A Metropolitan Dilemma:
Regional Planning, Governance and Power in Detroit, 1945-1995

by

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We shall solve the city problem by leaving the city.

Henry Ford

Oh, mercy mercy me
Oh things ain't what they used to be, no, no
Where did all the blue skies go?

Marvin Gaye, "Mercy, Mercy Me (The Ecology)"

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Dedication

For

Donald E. Stevens

(1955-2019)

Georgia L. Mason

(1924-2020)

and

Ivan V. Mason, Jr.

(1957-2020)

of blessed memory

and for

Rev. Julie Elizabeth Brock

and

Donovan Amos Brockerman

in love, struggle and faith

Acknowledgments

The late Detroit autoworker and revolutionary philosopher Jimmy Boggs observed that "it is only in relation to other bodies that anybody is somebody." In the same vein, this dissertation is the product of a multitude of academic, professional and personal relationships that I have been blessed with over the past decade and more. These acknowledgments comprise at best only a partial list.

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Although I have spent much of my life in academia, I have learned just as much or more from my experiences outside it. In particular, this dissertation has been informed by my work with 1000 Friends of Oregon, the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES), and the United Community Housing Coalition. I would especially like to thank Bob Stacey, Mary Kyle McCurdy, Richard Murphy, Conan Smith, Melanie Piana, Ponsella Hardaway, and Karen McLeod.

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My family has been there for me time and time again. My in-laws Kathe Stevens, Glenn Maxwell, and Ron Brock have given invaluable support and shared their love of Detroit and its history. My mother and father, Gloria Mason and Stuart Batterman, raised me to love learning

and encourage me to do what I might to repair the world. Over the past several years, three beloved family members have passed on: my wife's uncle Don Stevens, my grandmother Georgia Mason, and my uncle Ivan Mason, Jr. I dedicate this dissertation to their memory, and to the two people at the center of my beloved community.

In the acknowledgments to his doctoral dissertation, completed sixty-five years ago, Mel Ravitz concluded by thanking his wife Eleanore, who, he wrote, "shared for the usual number of years the doctoral degree tensions and difficulties, and gave constant encouragement to offset them."[1] My wife, the Reverend Julie Brock, has done the same, over a number of years that proved considerably greater than I initially led her to expect. She helps me remember that try as we might to understand this universe, and even hope of changing it, such grand aspirations must be anchored by the bonds of community and daily practices of love and joy. Our son, Donovan Amos Brockerman, has given those practices new shape over his first few months outside the womb, and his smiles remind us why the future is worth the fight.

[1] Mel J. Ravitz, "Factors Associated with the Selection of Nursing or Teaching as a Career" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1955), iii.

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List of Abbreviations

CHPC	Detroit Citizens Housing and Planning Committee
COG	council of governments
DSR	Detroit Department of Street Railways
EMEAC	East Michigan Environmental Action Council
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
HOLC	Home Owners Loan Corporation
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
MPO	metropolitan planning organization
MSA	metropolitan statistical area
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
RDI	Regional Development Initiative
RPC	Metropolitan Detroit Area Regional Planning Commission
SEMCOG	Southeast Michigan Council of Governments
SEMMCRC	Southeast Michigan Metropolitan Community Research Corporation
SEMTA	Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority
SICC	Supervisors Inter-County Committee
TALUS	Transportation and Land Use Study
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program
UAW	United Automobile Workers

Abstract

Scholars of planning and policy have long argued that metropolitan or regional institutions for planning and governance are needed to address such problems as urban sprawl, central city decline, and inter-jurisdictional segregation and inequality. Yet some form of regional planning and governance is already practiced in every major U.S. metro area under the auspices of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), which the federal government has mandated for roughly half a century. Why have these institutions proved inadequate to remedy America's "metropolitan dilemma" of sprawling, inequitable (sub)urbanization? Are they simply too weak? Have they lacked the political will to challenge this pattern? Or both?

I examine the question through a historical case study, based in archival research, of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), the MPO for the seven-county area that includes metropolitan Detroit. I argue that SEMCOG should be understood in the context of the political history of twentieth-century Detroit and the trajectory of twentieth-century American liberalism. The development of SEMCOG in the wake of the New Deal and World War Two reflected broader liberal efforts to harmonize private choice and public planning, and municipal autonomy with metropolitan interdependence, in an era of federally sponsored, whites-only suburbanization. SEMCOG's arrested development from the 1970s onward mirrored the broader unraveling of postwar American liberalism as the inherent tensions in the project became increasingly evident.

In the twenty years after World War Two, Detroit pioneered the development of regional institutions for planning and governance: a Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and a Supervisors Inter-County Committee (SICC). These institutions were initially intended not to challenge but to facilitate the prevailing patterns of outward development and the proliferation of independent suburban communities, both of which placed escalating burdens on the central city of Detroit and black Detroiters in particular.

The RPC and SICC were merged to form SEMCOG just as the political transformations wrought by suburbanization, segregation and the African American freedom movement shook the foundations of the liberal political order in which regional planning and governance had

evolved. As metropolitan politics grew increasingly racialized along city-suburb lines, and the federal government retreated from regional initiatives, SEMCOG survived the 1970s only by vowing to defend local control and eschewing a role in resolving issues of racial segregation and inequality, while accommodating the prevailing pattern of sprawl and disinvestment. When SEMCOG staff questioned this course, they were forced to back down in the face of opposition from the now-dominant suburban growth regime.

For advocates of regional planning and governance, there are sobering lessons to be drawn from the history of SEMCOG. In Detroit, institutions for regional planning and governance have failed to resolve the problems of sprawl and inequality, and in some respects exacerbated them, since these institutions are embedded within a larger political system that has been dominated by suburban development interests and defenders of racial and economic segregation. Although MPOs can help to bring important metropolitan issues before policymakers, and structural reform of MPOs could increase their capacity and willingness to do so, solving the metropolitan dilemma will ultimately require the development of a new multi-racial metropolitan politics that builds grassroots power for "reparative regionalism" across city-suburb boundaries.

Introduction

Walk a few blocks from my home on the near west side of Detroit, to the corner of Wildemere and Gladstone, and on a winter's day, when the snow muffles the movement of sound, you can almost imagine you've left the city entirely, or perhaps traveled back in time a hundred years and more, to an era before the city arrived. Streets and sidewalks where generations of children played are silent, and entire blocks where dozens of homes once stood are empty. Listen closely, however, and you can hear the faint rush of traffic on nearby expressways; look up, and you may see jets passing overhead. The quiet of the surroundings belies the fact that you stand not in a nineteenth-century farmer's field, or at the outer limits of the present-day city, but in the heart of a twenty-first century metropolis of over four million people—a hollowed-out heart, where much that was solid appears to have melted into air.[1]

Now get in a car—this is the Motor City, after all—and drive a half-mile to the westbound on-ramp of the Jeffries Freeway, officially designated the Rosa Parks Memorial Highway and more commonly known as U.S. Interstate 96. Continue for fifty miles: beyond the stacked bridges that mark the city limit at Telegraph Road, north across Eight Mile Road into Oakland County, past the acres of asphalt that make up the Novi shopping district, and finally through an area of lakes and low hills, relics of ancient glaciers, into Livingston County. Exit off the freeway halfway between Brighton and Howell at the Latson Road interchange, a $32 million construction project completed in 2013.[2] Head north, past the new cluster of competing retail "supercenters," and on either side of the road, for a mile and more, you can observe the inverse of the process unfolding at Wildemere and Gladstone. Home construction here has never

[1] See Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Verso, 1983 [1982]).
[2] Maria Stuart, "Latson Road Interchange: Crossing Fingers for Kinder, Gentler Development," *The Livingston Post*, December 1, 2013, https://thelivingstonpost.com/latson-road-interchange-crossing-fingers-for-kinder-gentler-development/, accessed December 27, 2020.

Figure I.1. Large areas of Detroit have become meadows, like this block in the Dexter-Linwood area. The shell of an apartment building constructed during the boom years of the 1920s stands as a reminder that this was once one of the city's most densely populated neighborhoods. Photo by author, 2020.

Figure I.2."The Meadows," a new subdivision at the metropolitan fringe near Howell, fifty miles to the northwest, nears completion in 2017. Jennifer Timar, "Builders: Livingston growing, but is it enough?"*Livingston Daily*, June 12, 2017, accessed October 5, 2020.

regained the heights it reached before 2008, but there are still new subdivisions taking shape: cul-de-sac after curling cul-de-sac, surrounded by gabled conglomerations of plywood and drywall, where two decades ago there was nothing but fields and forests.[3]

The disassembly of Detroit and the development of the far metropolitan fringe are two sides of the same process. Over the past seventy years, the metropolitan Detroit region has become arguably the world's most dramatic example of the pattern of (de)urbanization that the planning scholar Rolf Pendall has termed "sprawl without growth."[4] Some analysts refer to Detroit and its Rust Belt counterparts as "shrinking cities." That is true enough with respect to population loss in the central city: from 1950 to the present, the population of the Motor City fell by nearly two-thirds. Applied to the metropolitan area as a whole, however, the term is misleading. The population of the metropolitan area as a whole has not declined: from 1950 to 1970, it increased by roughly one million, and from 1970 to the present, it has remained effectively the same. What has changed is the distribution of population: out of the central city of Detroit, and increasingly out of the inner ring of suburbs, into a contiguous swath of suburban and exurban growth stretching as much as fifty miles from downtown Detroit, and even beyond the tri-county core comprised by Wayne, Oakland and Macomb County. Viewed geographically, then, Detroit is less a shrinking city than a spreading city, a great American metropolis that has gradually cannibalized itself.

Detroit is by most measures an extreme case. Yet it is not exceptional among U.S. cities, particularly those of the North and Midwest, most of which have lost population since 1950 even as their suburbs have proliferated.[5] "The most significant political, economic, and spatial transformation in the postwar United States," the historian Robert Self has written, "was the

[3] Jennifer Timar, "Builders: Livingston growing, but is it enough?" *Livingston Daily*, June 12, 2017, https://www.livingstondaily.com/story/news/local/community/livingston-county/2017/06/12/builders-livingston-growing-but-enough/365805001/, accessed October 5, 2020.

[4] Rolf Pendall, "Sprawl Without Growth: The Upstate Paradox," Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, October 2003, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/200310_Pendall.pdf, accessed October 7, 2020.

[5] Of the 20 largest U.S. cities in 1950, 14 are less populous today. Six of those 14—Detroit, St. Louis, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and Buffalo—have experienced population declines of over 50%. The six cities that have gained population since 1950 are New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, Seattle, and Kansas City. Notably, Kansas City—the only (arguably) Midwestern city among those six—experienced its peak population in 1970, likely due to annexation over the prior two decades, and then lost population over the 1970s and 1980s, though as of 2020 it is close to surpassing its 1970 peak.

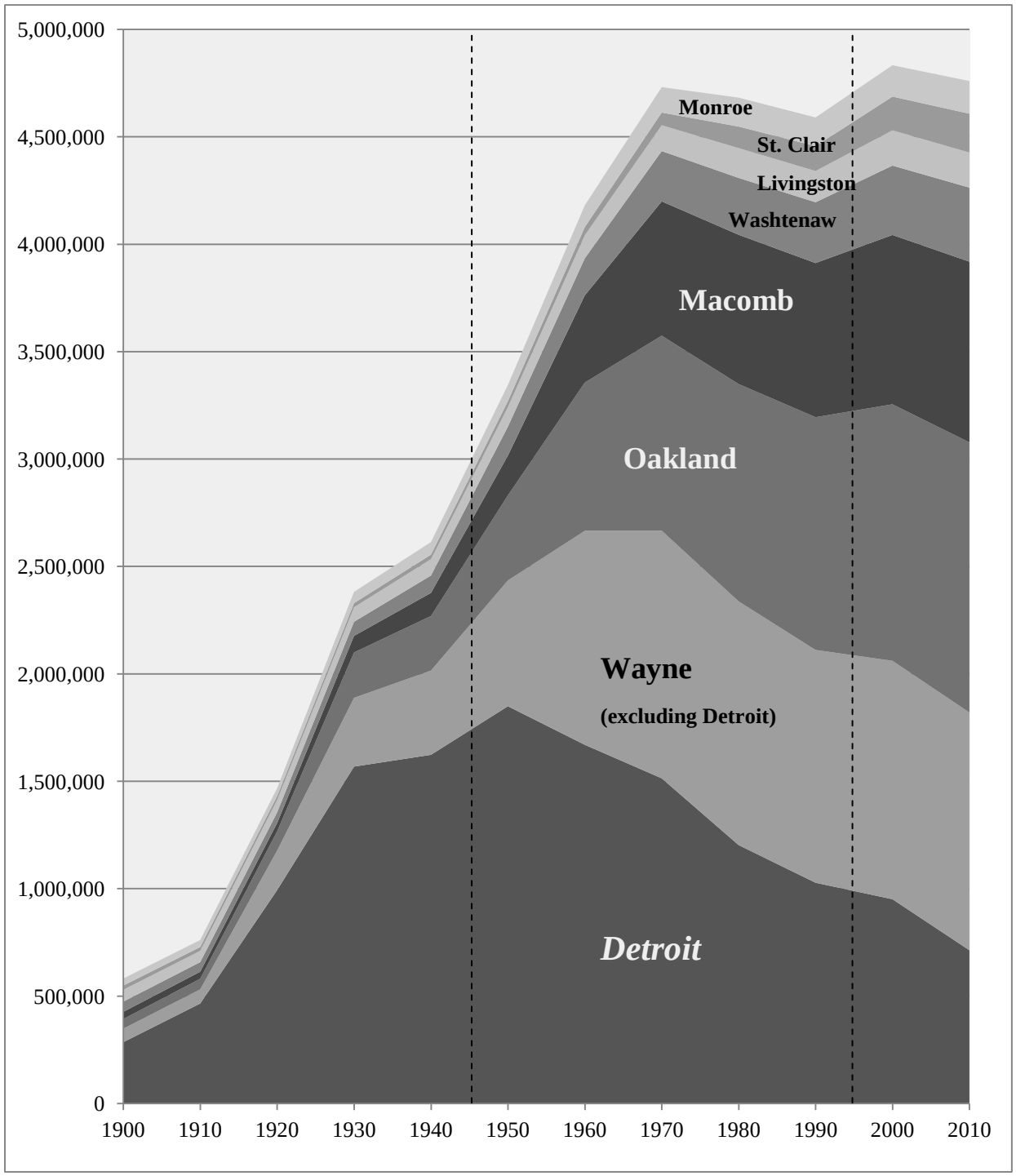

Figure I.3. Population of the seven-county SEMCOG region by county, 1900-2010. (Detroit is located in Wayne County.) The focus of this study is the 50-year period between 1945 and 1995, indicated by the dotted lines. U.S. Census Bureau.

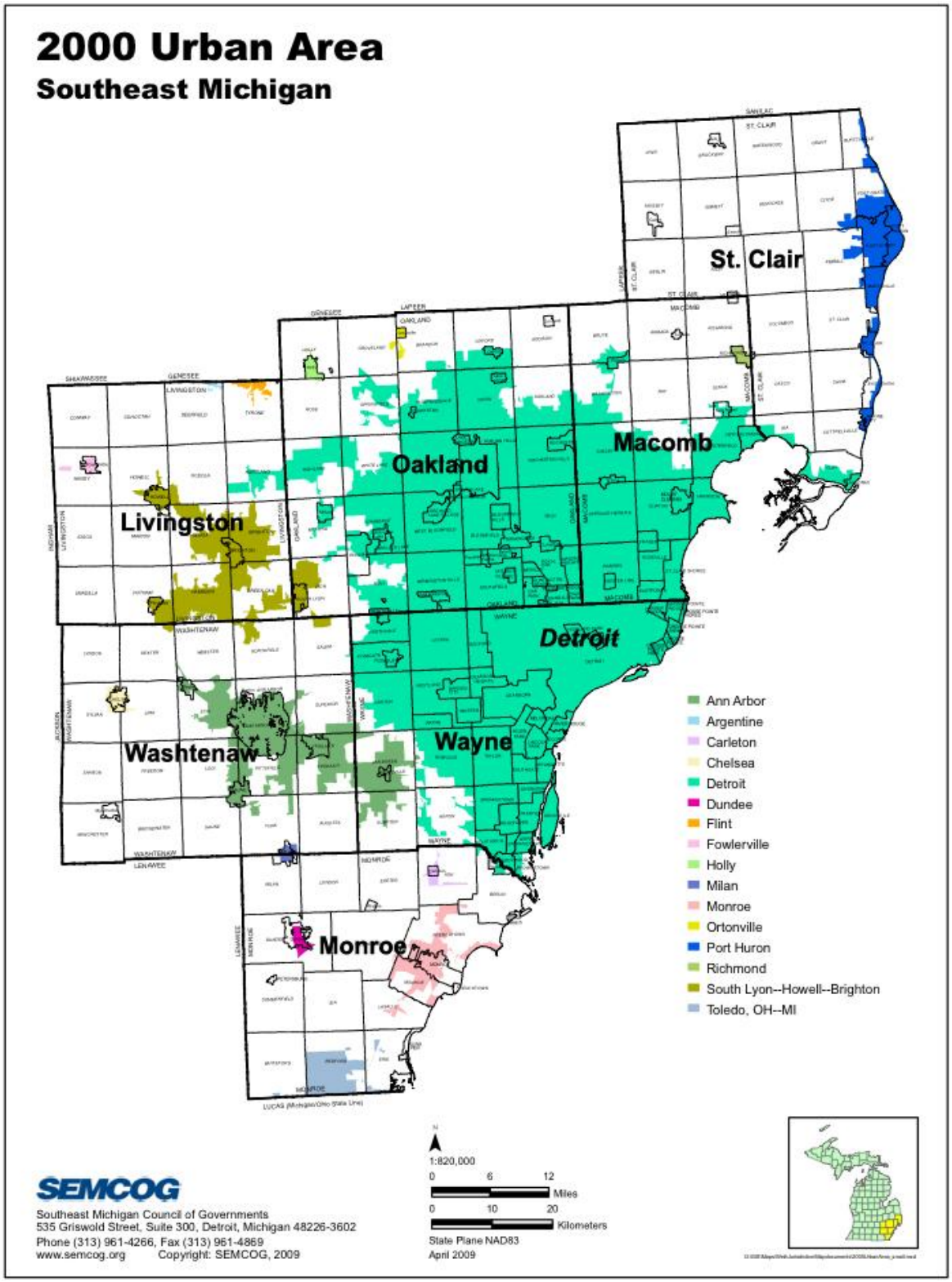

Figure I.4. The seven-county Southeast Michigan Council of Governments region, showing urbanized areas, 2000. SEMCOG, April 2009, via Daniel Little, "Measuring recession's impact: Michigan," Understanding Society, December 10, 2009.

overdevelopment of suburbs and the underdevelopment of cities."[6] This phenomenon has not always been viewed as a problem.[7] For over half a century, however, a variety of observers have warned that the twin processes of outward growth and political fragmentation risked exacerbating problems of inefficient governance, environmental degradation, and structural inequity.[8] Over the course of the 1990s, sprawl was increasingly cited by environmentalists as among the nation's top environmental problems, and more recently, referencing Gunnar Myrdal's landmark 1944 study of American racism, Matthew Lassiter described "the suburban synthesis of racial inequality and class segregation" as "the heart of what may or may not be the New American Dilemma."[9]

The Metropolitan Dilemma and Metropolitan Planning

The "metropolitan dilemma" that Detroit exemplifies—sprawling, inequitable suburbanization that has continued even in the absence of growth—has deep roots in American culture, politics, and economic life. It can be understood as a consequence of the triumph of the suburban "bourgeois utopia" as an aesthetic ideal; as a manifestation of discriminatory public policy; and as an example of the "creative destruction" wrought by modern capitalism.[10] What is rarely noted, except in specialized literature on transportation planning, is that in the three decades after World War Two, the federal government began to fund and, eventually, to mandate

[6] Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1.

[7] Apologists for sprawl and metropolitan fragmentation most often equate these phenomena with the workings of the "free market"—a dubious proposition, as this dissertation suggests. See Charles Tiebout, "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures," *Journal of Political Economy* 64.5 (1956), 416-424, and Robert Bruegmann, *Sprawl: A Compact History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[8] Early writings on these subjects included William H. Whyte, Jr., "Urban Sprawl," in *The Exploding Metropolis* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, 1958), 133-156; Charles Abrams, "Housing and the Suburban Milieu," in *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing* (New York: Harper, 1955), 137-149; and Robert Wood, *1400 Governments: The Political Economy of the New York Metropolitan Region* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961).

[9] Ann Brown et al., *Sprawl: The Dark Side of the American Dream* (Oakland, CA: Sierra Club, 1998), https://vault.sierraclub.org/sprawl/report98/, accessed January 21, 2021. Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 323.

[10] See, among others, Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Joe T. Darden, Richard Child Hill, June Thomas and Richard Thomas, *Detroit:Race and Uneven Development* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), and June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2013 [1997. For a useful review essay on the Detroit literature, see Kevin Boyle, "The Ruins of Detroit: Exploring the Urban Crisis in the Motor City," *Michigan Historical Review* 27.1 (2001), 109-127.

new structures of regional planning and governance that bridged the city-suburb divide.[11] From the advent of the New Deal, Washington had reshaped urban America in unprecedented ways, as federal dollars bankrolled highway development, funded "urban renewal," and underwrote millions of new suburban homes. A small group of critics began to warn that these policies could have unforeseen and potentially disastrous consequences in the absence of more careful planning, and in a 1961 message to Congress, President Kennedy described the need for "an effective and comprehensive planning process in each metropolitan area," a process that recognized "[t]he city and its suburbs [as] interdependent parts of a single community."[12] A dozen years later, after the passage of a series of laws that culminated with the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1973, the federal government finally began to mandate the existence of "metropolitan planning organizations," or MPOs, as a condition for metropolitan areas to receive federal transportation funds.[13]

Why have these metropolitan planning organizations so rarely shaken the American pattern of suburban sprawl and deprivation at the urban core, in spite of profound social, ecological and economic costs that have been recognized for more than half a century?[14] Why, indeed, have they apparently served to further that pattern, or at least been an accomplice to its continuation? And what can be done, in an era when widening inequality and ecological crisis cloud the future of all U.S. metropolitan areas, and perhaps the future of human society itself?[15]

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[11] "Regional planning" (and "regional governance") can sometimes refer to "regions" much larger than individual metropolitan areas, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority's seven-state service area. In this dissertation, I use the terms "regional" and "metropolitan" interchangeably. It should be noted that according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the seven-county region served by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) actually includes portions of three separate Census-designated metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs): the Detroit-Warren-Dearborn MSA, the Ann Arbor MSA, and the Monroe MSA. Further complicating matters, the Census Bureau also includes Lapeer County, which is not part of the SEMCOG region, as part of the Detroit-Warren-Dearborn MSA, rather than grouping it with Genessee County.) However, the three "separate" MSAs are relatively integrated as an economic and social unit.

[12] Robert Fishman, "The Death and Life of American Regional Planning," in Bruce Katz, ed., *Reflections on Regionalism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 107.

[13] Mark Solof, "History of Metropolitan Planning Organizations," New Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, Inc., January 1998, 21.

[14] Apologists for sprawl and metropolitan fragmentation do exist, generally equating these phenomena with the workings of the "free market"—a dubious proposition, as this dissertation suggests. See Charles Tiebout, "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures," *Journal of Political Economy* 64.5 (1956), 416-424, and Robert Bruegmann, *Sprawl: A Compact History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[15] See, for example, Elise Gould, "Decades of rising economic inequality in the U.S.," Economic Policy Institute, March 27, 2019, https://www.epi.org/publication/decades-of-rising-economic-inequality-in-the-u-s-testimony-before-the-u-s-house-of-representatives-ways-and-means-committee/, accessed December 28, 2020; Jonathan Watts, "We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, warns UN," *The Guardian*, October 8, 2018,

It is likely that of the nearly five million people who live in the seven-county region encompassed by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), only a small fraction are aware that the agency exists. The same is probably true of most of the nation's over 400 MPOs, which typically have a limited public profile. To some extent, this reflects the fact that while federal law mandates the existence of MPOs for urbanized areas of more than 50,000 residents, MPOs are not actually "MPOwered" (as it were) with broad authority to produce binding regional plans. In fact, few MPOs have any jurisdiction over land use planning *per se*, which remains the prerogative of local governments.[16]

MPOs exert the strongest formal authority in the process of transportation planning. In order for a metropolitan area to receive the federal funds that are essential for constructing and maintaining roads, highways, public transit systems, and other transportation infrastructure, its MPO must prepare long-term and short-term transportation plans that list the specific transportation projects to be funded. In theory, if an MPO's governing board were to reject a specific transportation project proposed within its jurisdiction—for example, the widening of an interstate highway by a state Department of Transportation—that project could not proceed, at least not with the federal funding which is vitally necessary for most major transportation projects.[17] Since transportation infrastructures (along with other public infrastructure, particularly water and sewer systems) powerfully influence the process of land development, MPO planning authority in the transportation arena is a potentially influential mechanism for shaping the overall process of regional urbanization.

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https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-must-not-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report, accessed December 28, 2020.

[16] The most notable exception is Oregon, where state land use law charges regional bodies, including the Portland region's Metro, with designating "urban growth boundaries." Carl Abbott, Deborah Howe, and Sy Adler, *Planning the Oregon Way* (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 1994). MPOs take a wide variety of institutional forms; the Council of Governments model is the most common, but they can also be housed in other units of government. In Rhode Island, for example, a state whose land area is significantly smaller than the seven-county SEMCOG area and which contains less than one-fourth its population, the designated MPO is a unit of state government: the Division of Statewide Planning of the state Department of Administration. "Division of Statewide Planning," State of Rhode Island Department of Administration, http://www.planning.ri.gov/, accessed Dec. 3 2020.

[17] The author and others unsuccessfully attempted to test this proposition during SEMCOG's 2013 regional plan approval process, urging the agency to eliminate funding for several highway expansion projects from its regional plan. See Khalil AlHajal, "Widening of I-94, I-75 in high-congestion areas approved despite protests," *MLive.com*, June 21, 2013, https://www.mlive.com/news/detroit/2013/06/widening_of_i-94_i-75_in_high-.html, accessed December 3, 2020. The federal government covers 80 to 90 percent of the cost of most major highway and transit projects. Federal Highway Administration, "Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act," https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/fastact/factsheets/federalsharefs.cfm, Feburary 2016, accessed January 19, 2021.

Given that most U.S. metropolitan areas have continued to experience varying degrees of outward sprawl and central city disinvestment since the formation of metropolitan planning organizations in the 1960s, most MPOs would seem to have been either incapable or unwilling to change this pattern of development, or perhaps both. Determining the precise nature of the problem—are MPOs too structurally weak, lacking political will, or both?[18]—is a crucial step towards formulating solutions. If the problem is "A," that MPOs lack the authority to shape metropolitan growth, planners and policymakers should seek ways to increase their powers. On the other hand, if the problem is "B," that MPOs do wield authority, but have chosen for sprawl and metropolitan cannibalization instead, the focus should be primarily on shifting their planning agenda.

The Trouble with MPOs: Structural Weakness, or Political Will?

It is possible to interpret A and B as mutually exclusive: if MPOs are in fact furthering sprawl (B), it follows that they *do* influence metropolitan development (A). However, neither diagnosis is necessarily an all-or-nothing proposition, and if A and B both hold true to a degree, a two-pronged approach is necessary. In that scenario, shifting the substantive agenda of MPOs without expanding their ability to actually influence metropolitan development would have little effect, and strengthening MPOs without shifting their substantive agenda could stand to exacerbate sprawl and disinvestment. Instead, both strategies must be pursued.

Scholarship on MPOs remains somewhat limited, probably due to their overall obscurity. However, researchers have amassed evidence for both type A and type B diagnoses of the problem. A useful review of the literature by Gian-Claudia Sciara identifies six specific structural shortcomings that together constitute "The Trouble with Contemporary [U.S.] Metropolitan Planning."[19] Four of these fall under the broad rubric of MPO weakness, or

[18] This formulation of the problem is inspired by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, as quoted by George Seldes (likely by way of David Hume): "The gods can either take away evil from the world and will not, or, being willing to do so cannot, or they neither can nor will, or lastly, they are both able and willing. If they have the will to remove evil and cannot, then they are not omnipotent. If they can, but will not, then they are not benevolent. If they are neither able nor willing, then they are neither omnipotent nor benevolent. Lastly, if they are both able and willing to annihilate evil, how does it exist?" George Seldes, *The Great Thoughts* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), xxi. Theologians and philosophers over the past two millennia have offered a variety of possible rejoinders (theodicies) in response to this logic.

[19] Gian-Claudia Sciara, "Metropolitan Transportation Planning: Lessons From the Past, Institutions for the Future," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 83.3 (2017), 262-276.

diagnosis A: MPOs' aforementioned lack of authority over land use; their lack of taxing powers; their often weak "organizational capacity," defined in terms of technical expertise; and, finally, the fact that their supposed authority in transportation planning is considerably weaker than it can appear on paper, as Kate Lowe has illustrated in case studies of the role of MPOs in transit planning in Boston and Miami.[20]

Sciara also highlights two type "B" issues that, she implies, may bias MPO governing boards in favor of highway investment and sprawl: the limited representation those boards provide for transit agencies (compared with state highway agencies, for example), and especially the over-representation of less populous suburban and exurban areas under the "one government, one vote" system (or variations on it) practiced by many MPOs.[21] A number of scholars have cited the inequity of this arrangement as a primary cause, perhaps *the* primary cause, of MPO policies favoring sprawl at the expense of central cities. In the case of SEMCOG, which was sued by a coalition of activists in the early 2000s over its system of governance, Joe Grengs noted that Livingston County residents enjoyed nearly ten times the representation of Detroit, accounting for population, on SEMCOG's governing board—a level of bias that rivals even that of the United States Senate.[22] Predictably, under-representation of central cities on MPO boards is accompanied by under-representation of nonwhite residents of MPO regions.[23] It makes logical sense that such under-representation would generate inequitable policy outcomes and further the process of sprawl. That said, fixing the representation problem would not necessarily alter planning outcomes.

Sciara's literature review concludes with a call for planners and policymakers to take a more optimistic attitude towards MPOs' latent potential, in spite of their various limitations.

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[20] In their designated transportation planning role, Lowe explains, the agencies face a "fiscal paradox;" although required to produce fiscally constrained regional transportation plans, MPOs have limited discretion over the allocation of transportation funds, so their "planning" role is often a process of ratifying decisions made by other, more powerful actors, such as state highway departments and transit agencies. "The MPO-led rational planning process," Lowe writes, "creates the impression that MPO planning is the regional decision site," whereas in reality "existing government arenas largely determine the outputs." One frustrated informant described the regional planning process as "a system that supports the illusion of choice." Kate Lowe, "Bypassing Equity? Transit Investment and Regional Transportation Planning," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 34.1 (2014) 30-44.

[21] Sciara, "Metropolitan Transportation Planning: Lessons From the Past, Institutions for the Future," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 83.3 (2017), 262-276.

[22] Grengs, Joe, "Fighting for Balanced Transportation in the Motor City," *Progressive Planning* 103 (2005): 7-10. Grengs (in some contrast to Lowe) emphasizes that MPOs do wield considerable formal power. "The problem with MPOs is that most of them are biased against central cities in their voting structure."

[23] Thomas Sanchez, "An Inherent Bias? Geographic and Racial-Ethnic Patterns of Metropolitan Planning Organization Boards," (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution), January 2006.

"Seen historically," she argues, "metropolitan planning has matured significantly," representing "a glass more half full than half empty," and MPOs can take steps to grow stronger, more equitable, and more "relevant" even in the absence of federal legislation to expand their authority. From the vantage point of a city that has half emptied since modern metropolitan planning was instituted, this argument may not be altogether reassuring. As noted, if the problem is that MPOs are pursuing policies that exacerbate sprawl and central city disinvestment, we might not wish to strengthen them at all. Before we can formulate an effective solution to the problem of metropolitan planning, we need a better understanding of whether the trouble with metropolitan planning organizations is one of institutional weakness, associated with their limited federal mandate; misplaced institutional priorities, perhaps associated with inequitable systems of representation; or somehow both.

Table 1. What is the trouble with MPOs?

A. "Structural weakness" theory: **MPOs have generally failed to alter prevailing patterns of sprawl and inequity because they are weak institutions with limited planning power.** **Lowe (2014):** "[E]xisting government arenas [i.e. not MPOs but other, mostly –though not necessarily—"non-regional" actors such as state DOTs, counties, and transit agencies] largely determine the outputs from MPO planning processes," on account of the fact that MPOs have no authority over how most transportation funds are actually allocated. ***Proposed solutions***: • The **federal government** should grant MPOs more power to allocate federal transportation funds (Katz, Puentes and	**B. "Political will" theory:** **MPOs have generally "failed" to alter prevailing patterns of sprawl and inequity because they have *successfully* planned for precisely those patterns.** **Basmajian (2013):** "Regional planning has been an important factor in metropolitan change in the United States during the twentieth century but has been conspicuously overlooked when researchers seek explanations for how and why urban change happens." Over the thirty-year period from 1970 to 2000, the Atlanta Regional Commission "helped establish a basic set of parameters and paths that structured future development," despite the fact that it did not wield "despotic power." Its efforts "could be deemed a success by the state," despite the fact that "protecting the environment and stopping sprawl [not to

Bernstein 2005). • **State governments** could enable MPOs with taxing authority so that they can generate their own revenue. [Note: A number of MPO host organizations (generally non-COG structures, such as states, cities or county governments) already wield this power.]	mention, as Bullard et al have documented, promoting regional equity, though this is not Basmajian's focus] were largely ignored," as the region and state's political leadership embraced a paradigm of unrestricted, auto-dependent suburban growth. ***Proposed solutions:*** Not discussed extensively, but Basmajian writes favorably of the ISTEA reforms of the early 1990s and other federal actions to emphasize the connection between transportation systems, land use, sustainability and social equity. He also supports the efforts of ARC and Atlanta legislators to provide multi-county areas with authority to levy regional taxes for infrastructure. It might be asked, however, whether these taxes would necessarily advance sustainability and equity goals, given the history Basmajian describes. Indeed, as Basmajian notes, a referendum on such a T-SPLOST (Transportation Special-Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax) was resoundingly defeated across the ARC region in 2012, in part because it was opposed by a range of groups across the region and political spectrum, from anti-tax activists to environmental groups and the NAACP.[24] **B-1. An extension of the "Political Will" theory: the "White/Suburban Bias" theory.** **MPOs have generally "failed" to alter prevailing patterns of sprawl and inequity because they have *successfully* planned for sprawl and**

[24] David P. Weinreich, "Making Self-Help Infrastructure Finance Regional: Promises and Perils of a Multi-Jurisdictional Approach" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2016), 118-157.

	inequity, due to inequitable governance structures that under-represent central cities and people of color. **Grengs (2005)**: "The problem with MPOs is that most of them are biased against central cities in their voting structure." **Sanchez (2006)**: "Suburban communities [i.e. not central cities] and white residents are over-represented in current MPO decision-making." That said, proportional representation is not necessarily "commensurate with equal power in policymaking and fund allocation." ***Proposed solutions:*** • The **federal government** should consider decertifying MPOs if they do not adopt proportionate structures of representation. • **State governments** should require proportionate representation on MPO boards. • **Citizens and grassroots organizations** may consider challenges to MPO structure under civil rights law, although the burden of proof is high.

Sciara meta-review of the literature (2017): The "weak MPO theory" and "wayward MPO theory" each have validity. MPO deficiencies are rooted in the structural weaknesses of MPOs, which are in turn rooted in their history. MPO structures were grafted onto pre-existing structures of transportation planning and funding that had evolved over the prior half-century and which continue to retain substantial power.

Structural weaknesses that limit MPOs include the following:

- Limited transportation planning authority
- Lack of authority over land use
- Lack of taxing power
- Lack of "organizational [technical] capacity"

Structural biases that may lead MPOs to favor sprawling, inequitable planning include the following:

- Lack of proportional representation for local governments on MPO boards, favoring suburbs and exurbs
- Lack of representation for transit agencies on many MPO boards, favoring highway agencies (e.g. state DOTs)

Proposed solutions

- **The federal government and state governments** should consider granting MPOs more discretionary authority in transportation funding and requiring them to adopt revised governance structures for greater equity among local governments *and* greater equity among providers of different transportation modes.

  Question: If MPOs had more discretionary authority in transportation funding, would they necessarily deploy it more equitably and sustainably than other actors do currently? Do MPOs wield the (admittedly) limited discretionary authority they do possess equitably?[25]

- **The federal government and state governments** should consider recasting representation on MPO governing boards, to both (1) ensure greater equity among representation of local governments and population *and* (2) greater equity among providers of different transportation modes (e.g. transit agencies as well as highway agencies/DOTs).

  Question: If formal governance of MPOs was restructured, would this necessarily shift MPOs' substantive policy priorities? Some MPOs already have proportional representation; are their plans more equitable and sustainable? Since the early 2000s, SEMCOG adopted a "dual voting system" that employes both "one-

[25] Todd Scott, "Time to Fix Michigan's CMAQ Problem," Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, https://detroitgreenways.org/time-to-fix-michigans-cmaq-problem/, accessed December 6, 2020.

government, one-vote," and a population-weighted vote; has this produced any shift in substantive planning outcomes?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What role have MPOs played in shaping American metropolitan development?

More specifically, given that most U.S. regions have continued to be defined by sprawling, inequitable growth over the past fifty years, why has the existence of MPOs not led to different outcomes, given the longstanding belief of many planners that metropolitan planning is essential to achieving such outcomes?

In considering this question, it is important to note that sprawling growth and inequitable growth do not necessarily go hand in hand, although they are generally assumed to accompany one another in U.S. regions.

Indeed, it is difficult to identify *any* U.S. metropolitan region that has not sprawled (defined as experiencing disproportionate suburban growth, relative to growth of the central city) over the past 50 years. To take one example, the population of suburban Washington County, just west of Portland, Oregon, has tripled over the 40 years since Portland's urban growth boundary was adopted.

Nor is it possible to identify any U.S. metro that has truly grown *more* equitable, although some have grown more equitably than others.

In *Just Growth*, Chris Benner and Manuel Pastor discuss Kansas City, Nashville, Jacksonville, and Columbus as metros that "performed relatively well on both growth and equity in the 1980s and 1990s." It is interesting to note that over the same period, growth in all four metros (two of which happen to be consolidated city-counties, and two of which are relatively rare instances of extensive postwar central city annexation in the Midwest) can also be described as fairly sprawling.[26] By the same token, some of the metro areas most often thought to be *less* sprawling, such as Portland, Oregon, are not necessarily the most equitable.

To conclude: is the "failure" (?) of MPOs to plan more equitable and sustainable metropolitan areas a consequence of their structural weakness ("weak MPOs"), misguided substantive policy agendas ("wayward MPOs"), and/or, as a variation on the latter, inequitable governance structures ("white/suburban bias"), and possibly pro-highway/anti-transit bias, as Sciara suggests?

[26] Chris Benner and Manuel Pastor, *Just Growth: Inclusion and Prosperity in America's Metropolitan Regions* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

The Case for a Historical-Institutionalist Case Study

Given the diversity of MPO institutional forms and U.S. metropolitan regions, and the opacity of the regional planning process, detailed case studies offer the best opportunity for a deeper understanding of the role that MPOs actually play in shaping metropolitan development. As Lowe emphasizes, that role must be understood in reference to the broader institutional context in which MPOs operate.[27] Furthermore, as Sciara suggests, we must also understand how the role of MPOs, in that context, has developed over time, particularly with regard to the "pre-history" of metropolitan planning: the development of city and state planning mechanisms (mostly for transportation planning) in the fifty years before the passage of the 1962 Federal Highway Act, which "planted the seeds" for MPOs by mandating a (theoretically) "continual, cooperative, and comprehensive" (3C) process of regional transportation planning.[28]

Over the past several decades, the revival of a "historical institutionalist" school of social research has provided useful models for this type of inquiry. Broadly speaking, historical institutionalists focus on the development of organizations over time, generally in the context of a broad analysis of political economy. While historical institutionalists recognize the power of economic interest in the shaping of political institutions, they stress that government institutions are not merely mechanisms for class domination, but agents unto themselves: they can act autonomously and even structure the forms that politics takes.[29] In a metropolitan setting, this approach suggests that though the city—or region—may indeed tend to function as a "growth machine" for a capitalist elite, that machine is not necessarily a well-oiled, smoothly operating vehicle reflecting the unified vision of a single team of engineers. Like some of the battered cars one sees plying the streets of Detroit neighborhoods, the political structures of the metropolis

[27] Lowe, "Bypassing Equity? Transit Investment and Regional Transportation Planning," 30.
[28] Sciara, "Metropolitan Transportation Planning: Lessons From the Past, Institutions for the Future," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 83.3 (2017), 262-276.
[29] Theda Skocpol terms this approach "Tocquevillian." "In this perspective, states matter not simply because of the goal-oriented activities of state officials. They matter because their organizational configurations, along with their overall patterns of activity, affect political culture, encourage some kinds of group formation and collective political actions (but not others), and make possible the raising of certain political issues (but not others)." Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 21. The implications of suburban political autonomy for the political engagement (or lack thereof) of suburban residents, a mood Sam Bass Warner Jr. memorably described as an "enervating parochialism," may form one of the more widely documented examples of this principle—ironically enough, given Tocqueville's celebration of localized government as an encouragement to participation in civic life.

form an assemblage that has been continuously—sometimes haphazardly—subtracted from and added to in the wake of various collisions.[30]

Given the quantitative orientation of most transportation research, there are relatively few case studies of metropolitan planning organizations, and even fewer that examine MPOs over a multi-decade time horizon. Indeed, there is only one book-length study that examines a metropolitan planning organization over the course of its lifetime: Carlton Wade Basmajian's study of the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), the metropolitan planning organization for that sprawling "New South" metropolis. Basmajian argues that ARC has exerted considerable influence over its 50-year history, despite its limited formal authority and relatively low public profile. Furthermore, ARC has facilitated the Atlanta region's spectacular sprawl, offering "a sharp contrast to the notion that regional planning necessarily leads to one set of ends [compact development, etc.]."[31] Returning to our previous schematic, then, we can say that on the question of what the trouble with MPOs really is, Basmajian tends towards diagnosis B.

Basmajian's study is a persuasive challenge to the "received wisdom" regarding the virtues of regional planning institutions.[32] That said, although it may appear at first glance to be a history of ARC, this is not the case, as Basmajian explains in his introduction. The first chapter outlines the historical evolution of regional planning in Atlanta, from a 1937 report by University of Michigan political scientist and municipal governance consultant Thomas Reed to the eventual birth of ARC in 1971.[33] The rest of the work, however, zeroes in on several specific regional planning issues over narrower time horizons that range from one year (planning for the Chattahoochee River watershed) to four years (the struggle over the Northern Arc expressway), rather than seeking to provide a comprehensive narrative regarding the structure, activities and orientation of ARC over time.[34] Furthermore, although Basmajian draws important connections between ARC's activities and broader political shifts in the metropolitan political landscape—

[30] A variant of historical institutionalism in U.S. political science is known as "American political development," or APD. For some intriguing applications of the method to urban and metropolitan history, see Richardson Dilworth, ed., *The City in American Political Development* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
[31] Carlton Wade Basmajian, *Atlanta Unbound* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2013), 179. It should be emphasized that MPOs in Portland and, especially, the Twin Cities have been less effective in curtailing sprawl than is sometimes assumed.
[32] Basmajian, *Atlanta Unbound,* 2.
[33] Reed, a native of Boston, became one of the nation's leading experts on municipal governance after serving as executive secretary to California Governor (later U.S. Senator) Hiram Johnson, and city manager of San Jose, whose city charter he framed (along with that of Alameda County). "Thomas H. Reed," University of Michigan Faculty History Project, http://faculty-history.dc.umich.edu/faculty/thomas-h-reed/bio, accessed January 21, 2021.
[34] Basmajian, *Atlanta Unbound,* 6.

such as the rise of black political power in Atlanta and the ascendancy of a new white political regime based in the city's wealthy northern suburbs—he does not attempt a systematic assessment of metropolitan political development, and some of the most important actors in metropolitan politics are absent from the narrative.[35] The next logical step in elucidating the workings of metropolitan planning organizations, then, is a broader historical study, one that may provide less information on the specific planning processes and products that Basmajian details, but that offers a more comprehensive sketch of MPO development over time, and places that in the context of other transformations in metropolitan politics and governance.

Excavating the Metropolitan Dilemma in Detroit

Although this study addresses a problem in urban and regional planning, it draws heavily on prior scholarship in urban and metropolitan history. The "new metropolitan history" has not only shed light on the past (and present) of U.S. cities and suburbs; in doing so, it has also reshaped the broader historical understanding of American politics in the second half of the twentieth century. Among the foundational works in this field (published nearly twenty-five years before this writing) was Thomas J. Sugrue's *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit.* In meticulous and disturbing fashion, *Origins* charted the deindustrialization of Detroit in the decade after World War Two and the rise of massive white resistance to neighborhood racial desegregration in the city, exposing the economic precarity, racial inequity and reactionary political ferment in the postwar Motor City and belying its popular image as a beacon of working-class affluence and left-liberal strength.[36]

Sugrue noted that while Detroit was in some respects an extreme case, similar arguments could be made about many other U.S. cities. Since then, scores of scholars have taken up that challenge. Although suburban development remained largely outside the scope of Sugrue's study, others have labored to extend his analysis to metropolitan regions as a whole, showing how urban and suburban politics co-evolved in the separate and unequal landscapes of the

[35] For example, a significant portion of Basmajian's narrative occurs during the tenure of Atlanta's first two African American mayors, Maynard Jackson (1974-1982; 1990-1994) and Andrew Young (1982-1990). However, the role of the city's new leadership (if any) in ARC is not discussed. Jackson is not listed in the index, and Young appears in the text only once, not as Mayor but in his prior office in Congress, as the sponsor of a bill for the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. Basmajian, *Atlanta Unbound*, 77.

[36] On the latter, see Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945-1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

postwar years, and ultimately helped give rise to a new bipartisan, ostensibly color-blind politics rooted in the maintenance of state-sanctioned suburban separatism.[37]

The following study of metropolitan planning, governance and power in Detroit, focused on the development of SEMCOG and its predecessor institutions, attempts to bring the broader insights of metropolitan historians to bear on this specific institutional history. Detroit is a useful vantage point into MPO development because for several reasons, all traceable to the Motor City's defining industry, it found itself on the cutting edge of the "metropolitan dilemma." First, the region was a pioneer in pre-World War Two suburban super-highway construction. Second, it experienced rapid decentralization of its manufacturing base during the war and the decade that followed. Finally, it was a primary destination of the Great Migration of African Americans from the South. There is little question that Detroit is an extreme case. Yet on the whole, it is probably more typical of most American metropolitan areas, and certainly the older metros of the Northeast and Midwest, than the pair most often examined by students of regional planning and governance: Portland, Oregon and Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota. Certainly, in the postwar period, Detroit's leaders considered their region a model of the modern multi-jurisdictional metropolis, as did the Ford Foundation when it funded the metropolitan planning and governance re-organization effort that ultimately produced SEMCOG.

This history, in tracing the development of regional planning and governance in Detroit over five decades, sketches the development of the political infrastructure that has shaped and sustained the modern metropolitan dilemma of racial and economic segregation; disinvestment in central cities and older suburbs; and sprawl. It is by no means a full accounting of that story, or a comprehensive history of SEMCOG. Indeed, one of the reasons that the political economy of metropolitan development is so little understood is that so many different units of government are involved—ranging from cities and townships to counties and school districts. In particular, in focusing on the officially designated institutions for comprehensive, general-purpose regional planning and governance, my narrative may tend to under-emphasize the power of the older and more influential infrastructural empires—particularly the Detroit Water and Sewer Department,

[37] See, among others, Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*; Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*; David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy & White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

the County Road Commissions, and the State Highway Department—that actually laid the groundwork for metropolitan development.[38]

However, a focus on the formal institutions for regional planning and governance offers unique insights into the political economy of metropolitan development in the postwar era, as various iterations of the "metropolitan dilemma" came to the fore. In Detroit, such institutions originally formed the vanguard of elite efforts to retool the metropolitan political system, after growing frustrations with one aspect of what they termed their "metropolitan problem"—the difficulty of efficient decision-making in a politically fragmented region. It so happened that those efforts bore fruit—the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG)—in 1967-8, precisely as another problem came to the fore: the metropolitan iteration of the "American dilemma" of racial segregation and inequality. As the movements for civil rights and black power forced a public reckoning with that problem, which was popularly known as the "urban crisis" but might just as easily be described as a suburban or metropolitan one, SEMCOG became embroiled in questions of regional redistribution which many of its framers had not conceived of addressing.

SEMCOG managed to survive the political firestorms of the ensuing decade, which saw black central city politicians and white suburban leaders rally around their own banners of local control. It did so, however, only by relinquishing any notion that it might become a stronger metropolitan government, and rejecting the efforts of corporate leaders who sought to centralize metropolitan administration in much the same way that municipal governance in Detroit had been refashioned fifty years earlier. Two further interpretations of the "metropolitan dilemma" came to the fore as suburbanization continued: an ecological interpretation, as environmental activists attempted to protect undeveloped land, particularly in Oakland County; and an economic-inequality interpretation, as the leaders of older, still largely white suburbs saw their communities increasingly cannibalized by growth at the fringe. However, the region's racial divide remained the most salient political division, and as the region's corporate leadership increasingly distanced itself from the central city, SEMCOG's attempt to lead a regional reckoning on the costs of sprawl and inequality was quickly quashed.

[38] For detailed studies of some of these institutions, see Philip J. D'Anieri, "Regional Reform in Historic Perspective" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2007) and Dana Kornberg, "The Structural Origins of Territorial Stigma," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40.2 (2016), 1-21.

My argument proceeds in four chronological chapters. Chapter 1 describes the development of SEMCOG's predecessor organizations, the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and the Supervisors Inter-County Committee (SICC). The chapter begins with an overview of how Detroit's corporate leaders took the wheel of city government in the 1920s and laid out a blueprint for a decentralized metropolis geared to the capacities of the automobile, a blueprint furthered by federal aid during the New Deal and Second World War. The formal authority wielded by the RPC and SICC was limited, as demonstrated by their marginal role in several debates over regional infrastructure in the 1950s, but their influence was felt nonetheless: they helped to facilitate suburbanization and provided a framework for the suburbs' budding political power in a metropolitan political landscape previously dominated by the city of Detroit. Given the exclusive character of suburban development, regional planning for suburbanization speeded the exodus of white homeowners from the city and hastened the process of racial and economic transition within the city of Detroit. It was an outcome that regional planners ignored; focused chiefly on physical planning and suburban development, they treated the condition of the central city largely as an afterthought.

Chapter 2 describes how the RPC and SICC became SEMCOG. In the early 1960s, amidst a national re-examination of the costs of metropolitan growth, the Ford Foundation sponsored an effort to strengthen and streamline metropolitan institutions in Detroit, recruiting a city manager named Kent Mathewson, who had helped found one of the nation's first "councils of government" in Salem, Oregon, to oversee the effort under the auspices of the Metropolitan Fund, a nonprofit organization that Edward Connor had founded. By the early 1960s, the growth of suburbia and the incipient decline of central cities had prompted a nationwide reexamination of metropolitan governance reform. The ascendance of the Great Society political coalition in Washington gave reformers a chance to put theory into practice, and Detroit struck some as an ideal candidate for reconstructing metropolitan governance, especially after its increasingly powerful black electorate—empowered by white flight to the suburbs—secured the election of liberal mayor Jerome Cavanagh. Reflecting the pluralist ideology of the era, the Metropolitan Fund had considerable confidence in the model of voluntary regional cooperation that a Council of Governments embodied. Although the anticipated policy agenda of the new COG remained indeterminate, its backers hoped that by merging regional planning and regional governance in a

single institution, and providing direct representation for the city of Detroit, it would facilitate a more efficient metropolitan pluralism.

Chapter 3 relates how the Detroit rebellion of 1967 and the political upheavals that followed brought the region's longstanding conflicts of race and class to a head and helped transform the politics of regional planning and governance. On the one hand, SEMCOG's director initially pledged the organization to helping resolve the region's racial dilemma. On the other, the growing racial polarization between city and suburbs put SEMCOG's survival in question. Many white suburban leaders feared SEMCOG as a tool of the regional redistribution and desegregation that liberals had come to advocate, following the precepts of the Kerner Report. Detroit's rising class of black political leaders, meanwhile, was also wary of regional governance schemes as threats to their authority, particularly after Coleman Young won election as Detroit Mayor in 1973. SEMCOG managed to survive, but given its weak institutional basis, it could do so only by avoiding controversy. Frustrated by SEMCOG's lack of action, and perhaps unmindful of the degree to which the political landscape had been transformed over the previous ten years, the Metropolitan Fund attempted to bypass its own creation by advocating a stronger regional government, a proposal that failed spectacularly after managing to unite SEMCOG's members in mutual defense of local control.

Chapter 4 explains the implications of SEMCOG's weak institutional structure over its first quarter-century, despite the limited authority granted to SEMCOG and other metropolitan planning organizations by federal policy. It also suggests the profound influence of metropolitan racial segregation on what Margaret Weir has called the "calculus of coalitions" for preventing suburban sprawl and urban disinvestment. Although local campaigns for land preservation in Oakland County won several victories in the 1970s, these campaigns did not focus on SEMCOG, which tended to ratify decisions made by more powerful bodies such as the counties and the state. In the late 1980s, however, inspired by opposition to a proposed mega-mall in the outer suburbs, longtime SEMCOG director John Amberger and his staff embarked on a project they called the Regional Development Initiative, producing a report that linked sprawl to racial segregation and inequality and provided recommendations for countering both. The effort ran headlong into the Oakland County suburban growth machine that decades of regional planning had helped to foster, and that was now—along with race and class segregation—the region's most powerful political force. The Oakland County Board of Commissioners condemned the

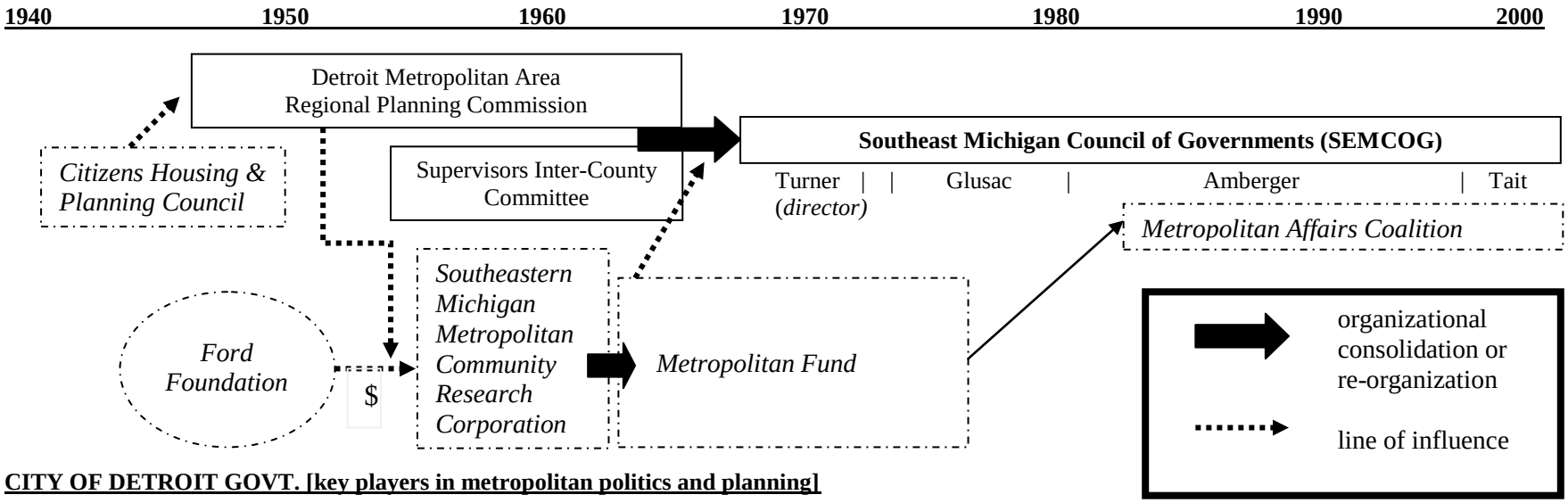
report, threatening to pull out of SEMCOG and nearly costing Amberger his job. The Regional Development Initiative's recommendations helped raise awareness regarding inter-jurisdictional inequalities, and may have contributed to ensuing reforms of Michigan's school funding system, but a more fundamental resolution of the "metropolitan dilemma" proved elusive. Two years later, the outspoken anti-busing leader, "law and order" prosecutor and self-described "sprawler" L. Brooks Patterson won election as Oakland County Executive. His 26-year reign as the region's most influential elected official marked the triumph of the politics of segregation and fringe development at the expense of older communities, most of all Patterson's native Detroit, but increasingly including inner-ring suburbs and satellite cities like Pontiac.

Looking backward from the perspective of 2021, the trajectory of metropolitan planning and governance in greater Detroit can seem vastly over-determined. In telling this story, however, I have tried to avoid what E.P. Thompson called "the enormous condescension of posterity."[39] The individuals who people this story believed that alternate futures were possible through their actions—regardless of whether we, today, are confident that such alternatives would necessarily have been better than our present.[40] History may be most valuable when it sheds light on the possibility of paths not taken, even if it is also more tragic.

[39] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966 [1963], 12.

[40] C. Vann Woodward's advice in his essay "The Irony of Southern History"—inspired by onetime Detroit pastor Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Irony of American History*—is also worth consideration. When considering the actions of protagonists in an ironic situation, Woodward writes, "the historian must be able to appreciate both elements in the incongruity that go to make up the ironic situation, both the virtue and the vice to which pretensions of virtue may lead. He must not be so hostile as to deny the element of virtue or strength on the one side, nor so sympathetic as to ignore the vanity or weakness to which the virtue and strength have contributed." C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* [revised edition] (New York: New American Library, 1968), 136.

Figure I.5. Regional planning and governance in metropolitan Detroit, 1945-1995.



CITY OF DETROIT GOVT. [key players in metropolitan politics and planning]

Mayor

Jeffries	Van Antwerp	Cobo	Miriani	Cavanagh	Gribbs	Young	Archer

Water Dept. Manager ---- Lenhardt | Remus ----------

Common Council ---------- Connor----------

---------- Ravitz---------- ----------Ravitz----------

WAYNE COUNTY GOVT. ----------Henderson----------

Highway Engineer ----- Smith (from 1918) ---------

County Executive (1983-)

Lucas	McNamara

OAKLAND COUNTY GOVT.

County Executive (1974-)

Murphy	Patterson

STATE OF MICHIGAN

Governor	Williams	Romney	Milliken	Blanchard	Engler

Chapter 1: Politics and Planning in the Exploding Metropolis

In 1958, the urbanist William H. Whyte and the editors of *Fortune* magazine published a volume of articles on American cities titled *The Exploding Metropolis.* In the "centrifugal movement" to the suburbs, a phenomenon Whyte termed "urban sprawl," the authors observed that "the city has been losing some of its traditional strength as a unifying element of the region."[1] Few places exemplified this phenomenon better than Detroit, whose automotive industry had helped make mass suburbanization possible.

Detroit's last annexations of land had occurred in 1926, but in 1940 the city still accounted for nearly three-fourths of the population of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb County. In the two decades that followed, the city-suburb balance shifted dramatically. By 1960, more than half of the region's approximately 4 million people lived outside the central city, and the Motor City's population registered a slight decline from its 1950 peak. The economic life of the region was suburbanizing too. Detroit's automakers abandoned central city factories for modern plants in the suburbs, and downtown Detroit's central business district ebbed as new shopping malls—enticing shoppers with abundant parking—took shape just beyond the city limits.

Detroit's postwar suburbanization had been enabled by the automobile, but it had been driven by public policy dating back decades to the close of World War One, when the Motor City's automobile executives took control of city government and laid out a vision for a centrifugal city: a low-density metropolis built around a network of modern super-highways. In the wake of the New Deal and World War Two, this centrifugal city became an increasingly segregated one, as government policy and violent neighborhood resistance confined Detroit's growing black population to the older sections of the central city.

[1]William H. Whyte, ed., *The Exploding Metropolis* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, 1958), 8-9.

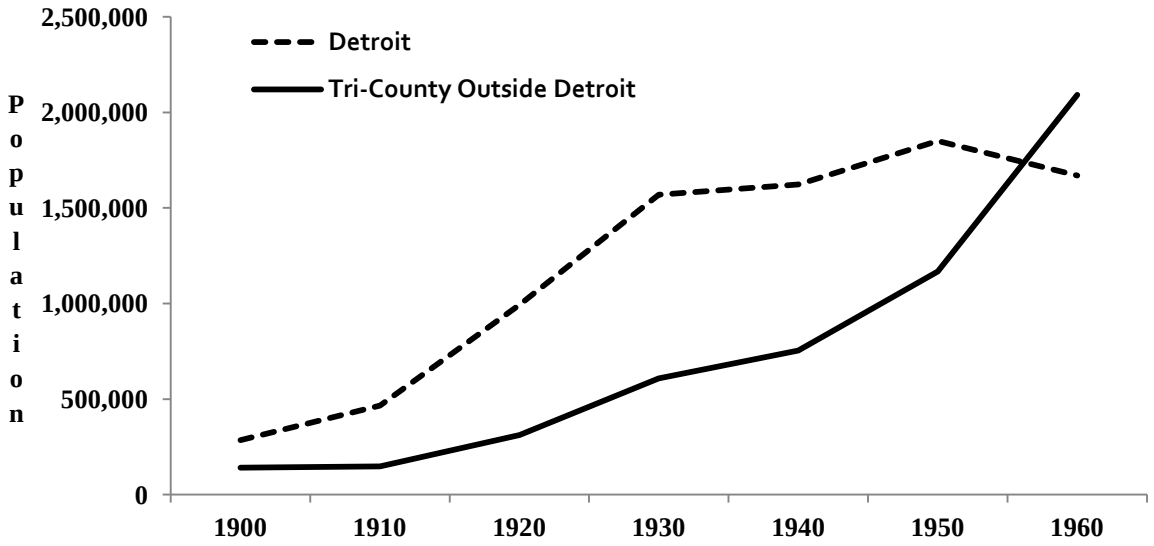


Figure 1.1. Detroit and suburban Detroit population, 1900-1960. Population growth in the suburbs began to outpace the city in the Thirties. By 1960, a majority of the region's people lived outside Detroit. U.S. Census Bureau.

As independent suburbs burgeoned in the postwar era, Detroit's political and corporate leaders pioneered the development of general-purpose institutions, encompassing city and suburbs, for regional planning and governance. In 1947, they created the Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission (RPC), the first public regional planning agency in a major American metropolitan area. In 1954, county leaders founded the Supervisors Inter-County Committee, the first permanent metropolitan inter-governmental council in the United States.

In the age of the exploding metropolis, Detroit could claim to be at the forefront of national efforts to adapt metropolitan systems for planning and governance, establishing new regional institutions to fulfill roles that had historically been the province of the central city alone. To be sure, these institutions were weak and limited in scope, and they were not intended to redress the growing imbalance between city and suburbs. Indeed, they largely served to facilitate suburbanization: the suburbanization of Detroit's white population and economic life. The long-term costs of the metropolitan explosion they left for future generations to gauge.

Blueprint for a Centrifugal City

Detroit's transformation into a decentralized, automobile-oriented metropolis began in earnest in the boom years after World War One, as the city's auto barons took the wheel of

Detroit's city government and re-engineered it as a vehicle for their interests. In 1918, the Detroit Citizens League—an elite group founded by Cadillac president Henry Leland—convinced voters to approve a sweeping overhaul of city government. The new city charter centralized municipal government, putting all city departments under direct control of the mayor, and substituted a nine-member "Common Council," elected "at large" from across the city, for the thirty-six member, ward-based city council that had preceded it.[2] The first elections conducted under the new charter, in November 1918, also transformed who was in charge of Detroit's municipal machinery. The Citizens League's candidates for the new Common Council swept to victory over a labor slate backed by the Detroit Federation of Labor. The majoritarian orientation of at-large elections had a particularly dramatic effect. The new system effectively wiped out representation for Detroit's immigrant communities in city government. At a time when one in three Detroiters was a first-generation immigrant to the United States, the new Council was entirely native-born, and eight of the nine were businessmen.[3]

The League's candidate failed to win the race for Mayor. But the victor, James Couzens, was no stranger to Detroit's automotive elite. Couzens had served as general manager for Ford Motor Company, where he helped Henry Ford hatch the Five-Dollar-Day, before resigning in exasperation with his boss's egotism.[4] As a candidate for Mayor, Couzens planted himself in the populist tradition of the late Mayor Hazen Pingree by calling for public ownership of the Detroit United Railway, Detroit's privately owned streetcar monopoly. Like Pingree, Couzens staged an act of civil disobedience by boarding a streetcar and refusing to pay fare, which the DUR had just raised to six cents.[5] The stunt spurred hundreds of copycat actions and helped give Couzens a landslide victory on Election Day.[6] Despite Couzens' willingness to antagonize his fellow businessmen on occasion, as Mayor he took steps to involve them in directing Detroit's growth.

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[2] Daniel Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 18-26. From 1918 to 2013, Detroit was among the largest U.S. cities, and possibly the largest, to have had a city council elected entirely at large.
[3] Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis*, 56.
[4] Robert Conot, *American Odyssey* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1974), 185.
[5] H.B. Craig II, "The Municipal Take-Over of the City Lines (1921-22)," *Detroit Transit History*, http://www.detroittransithistory.info/TheCityTakeover.html, accessed April 16, 2020.
[6] Conot, *American Odyssey*, 198-9. According to Conot, several decades earlier, a youthful Couzens has been a member of the crowd who tipped a DUR trolley into the Detroit River during the 1891 conductors' strike. Conot, *American Odyssey*, 104-5, 124.

Soon after taking office, Couzens summoned 250 local executives and public officials to a "reconstruction meeting" to plan a massive infrastructure program for Detroit.[7]

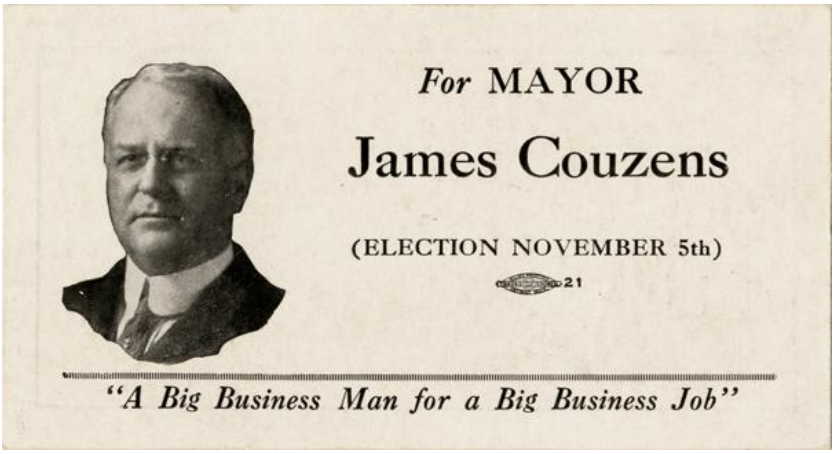

Figure 1.2a and 1.2b. Architects of Detroit's 1920s expansion: former Ford executive and Detroit Mayor James Couzens, "A Big Business Man for a Big Business Job," and former Packard executive Colonel Sidney Waldon, chair of the Rapid Transit Commission. Detroit Public Library and Historic Boston-Edison Assn., accessed February 1, 2021.

From 1910 to 1920, the city's population had doubled to almost one million, and a series of annexations had nearly doubled its physical extent. Until 1915, the city's northernmost neighborhood had been the Boston-Edison district, where Couzens and other executives built their mansions four miles from downtown Detroit. After the annexations, Detroit surrounded the independent factory towns of Highland Park and Hamtramck, home to the Ford and Dodge assembly lines. It stretched beyond the industrial belt of the Detroit Terminal Railroad, and north along Woodward Avenue, where the Wayne County Road Commission had laid the world's first mile of concrete highway in 1909, all the way to the County's boundary at Eight Mile Road. The city government now faced the challenge of providing for the development of this area.[8]

With voter approval, the City issued $37 million in bonds—nearly half a billion in 2019 dollars—for the public utilities that would help developers to transform fields and orchards into factories and homes. Over Mayor Couzens' four-year term, he oversaw the construction of 100 miles of sewer mains, 200 miles of lateral sewers, and 170 miles of roads.[9] Yet this was just the

[7] Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis*, 56.
[8] Alex B. Hill, "Map: Color Coded Detroit Growth by Annexation," *Detroitography*, https://detroitography.com/2013/11/02/map-color-coded-detroit-growth-by-annexation/, accessed January 22, 2021.
[9] Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis,* 56-57.

beginning. Before leaving office, Couzens appointed a Rapid Transit Commission chaired by former Packard executive Colonel Sidney Waldon. It was the Rapid Transit Commission's 1925 plan which set forth a radical vision for a decentralized city built around the car.

Waldon understood that the automobile was already revolutionizing the process of urban growth. "The automobile has become the pioneer in the development of otherwise inaccessible places," he stated. "It is the greatest distributor of land values that the world has ever seen."[10] The Rapid Transit Commission's plan projected that Detroit's outward sprawl would continue for generations to come. "In 1950 the city will probably extend out 11 miles from the present center," it predicted. By the year 2000, it would extend 15 miles out, for a total area of more than 400 square miles: nearly four times the city's extent in 1924.[11]

By 1925, the outer portions of Detroit's major radial roads—Woodward, Gratiot, Grand River, and Michigan Avenues—were already being expanded to 204 feet in width. Grand River, Woodward and Gratiot spanned the Eight Mile Road boundary between Wayne County and Oakland and Macomb County to the north; with that in mind, a 1925 act of the Michigan Legislature had enabled adjacent counties to form joint Super-Highway Commissions for the purpose of acquiring right-of-way.[12] The Rapid Transit Commission's master plan proposed to extend these 204-foot super-highways and 120-foot "major thoroughfares" into the heart of the city. "Population follows transportation," the plan noted. "Conversely, transportation must be supplied to induce population." The plan, proclaimed the Commission, without modesty but not without reason, "will become the real basis of the City Plan for Greater Detroit."[13]

The Master Plan had not assumed that the automobile would serve the transportation needs of all Detroiters. Although automobile registrations in Detroit had skyrocketed, most of Detroit's factory workers could not yet afford to purchase the vehicles they built. As of 1929, only one in three Ford workers owned their own cars. The rest, if they did not live within walking distance of their factories, relied on the streetcar system that Mayor Couzens had finally brought into public ownership as the Detroit Department of Street Railways. [14]

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[10] Sidney D. Waldon, "Provide Now for Future Transportation," address at the American Electric Railway Association Convention, Cleveland, Ohio, October 5, 1926.
[11] "Rapid Transit System for the City of Detroit," City of Detroit Rapid Transit Commission, August 16, 1926, in DPL.
[12] John S. Haggerty, letter to Sidney D. Waldon, September 15, 1927, in RTC Papers, Box 3.
[13] "Rapid Transit System for the City of Detroit," City of Detroit Rapid Transit Commission, August 16, 1926.
[14] Boyle and Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons: Images of Working-Class Detroit, 1900-1930* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 116.

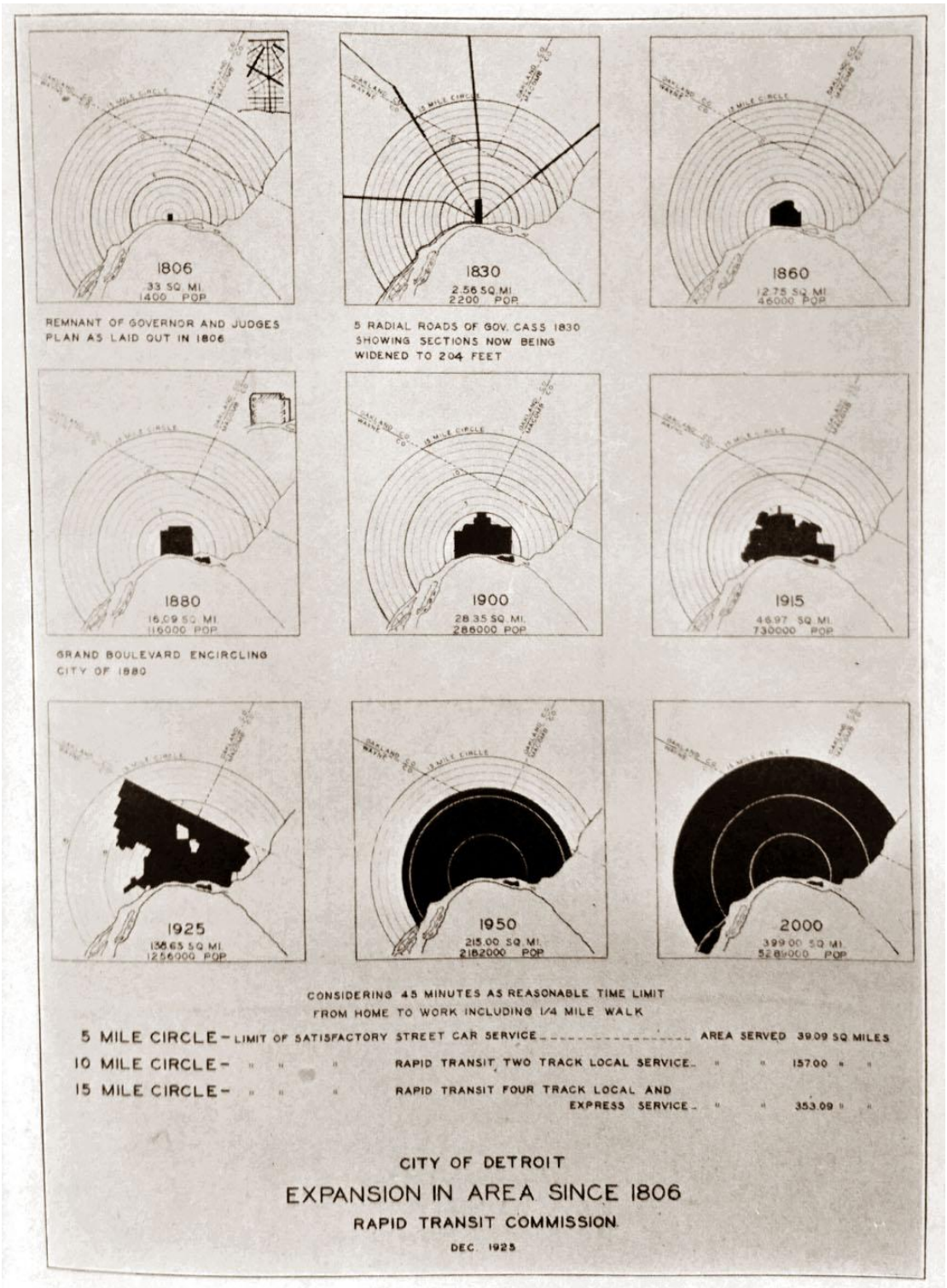

Figure 1.3. The Rapid Transit Commission's blueprint for a centrifugal city. In "Rapid Transit System for the City of Detroit," City of Detroit Rapid Transit Commission, August 16, 1926, DPL.

Yet as the city grew, the slow-moving streetcars of the DSR strained at the task of transporting Detroit's working class. A five-mile radius, the Rapid Transit Commission stated, was "the limit of satisfactory street car service." As Detroit's automakers relocated to huge new plants at the edge of town, like Ford's River Rouge facility, their employees spent as much as an hour and a half on the streetcar commuting from the working-class neighborhoods of central Detroit.[15]

The RTC urged construction of a modern rapid transit system, consisting of subways and surface rail lines, separated from street traffic, which would speed workers to outlying factories. Yet the RTC and the Citizens League failed to convince a majority of Detroit voters to approve their subway proposals. The last major ballot effort for a subway, in 1929, met a resounding defeat at the hands of a coalition of outlying homeowners' organizations, whose middle-class members had no desire to pay higher taxes for a subway they viewed as a public subsidy for elite business interests.[16] "If downtown merchants and outside-the-city-limits manufacturers desire special transit advantages," wrote one resident in a letter to the *Detroit News*, "it is high time for them to club together, become philanthropic, and make a present to the city of a model unit of a rapid transit system."[17] Rapid transit in Detroit would move forward on rubber, not rails, and as the Roaring Twenties drew to a close, Colonel Waldon vacated his Boston-Edison home for a new mansion on a ridge near the village of Clarkston in central Oakland County, thirty miles from downtown Detroit.[18]

The Great Depression brought the Motor City to a near standstill. By August of 1930, Detroit's factories had cut their workforce in half, giving the city the nation's highest rate of unemployment. Several automakers loaned their buildings to the City for use as temporary shelters for the homeless. [19] Housing development ground to a halt, as did new public works.[20] The City of Detroit, barely able to make payroll, experimented with turning off half the

[15] Davis, Donald F., "The City Remodeled: The Limits of Automotive Industry Leadership in Detroit, 1910-1929," in *Histoire Sociale - Social History* XIII (26), 473.
[16] Jones, Howard P., "Barber Shop Opinion and Rapid Transit in Detroit," *National Municipal Review* 18 (June 1929).
[17] "Transit Ideas Fill Letter Box," *Detroit News*, March 31, 1929, 2.
[18] "Automobile Pioneers of the Historic Boston-Edison District," Boston-Edison Historic District Association, https://www.historicbostonedison.org/Significant-Residents-of-BE#auto, accessed April 20, 2020.
[19] Sidney Fine, *Frank Murphy: The Detroit Years* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 201, 273. Streetcar ridership also fell by half between 1929 and 1933, suggesting the close link between factory employment and streetcar ridership. Fine, 247.
[20] Fine, *Frank Murphy: The Detroit Years*, 247.

Figure 1.4. Widening of Woodward Avenue, 1936, looking south towards downtown Detroit. St. John's Episcopal Church (foreground) has been shifted sixty feet to the left to make way for the widening. Walter Reuther Library, Detroit, MI.

streetlights on major streets, until a spike in nighttime traffic deaths prompted a reconsideration of the policy.[21]

Detroit Mayor Frank Murphy, a populist swept into office by working-class voters in 1930, convened fellow big-city mayors for a conference in Detroit to plead for federal aid. Even President Hoover acceded to some of their demands, signing off on an "Emergency Relief and Construction Act" that included substantial funding for public works.[22] Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal would bring more. By the close of the Thirties, the city had put the funds to work and accomplished the formidable task of widening its radial avenues to ease traffic congestion, a

[21] Fine, *Frank Murphy: The Detroit Years*, 319-20.
[22] Fine, *Frank Murphy: The Detroit Years*, 351-2.

process that began with the demolition of all the structures on one side of each thoroughfare. Woodward Avenue was a special challenge: north of the downtown area, a series of gracious houses of worship fronted Detroit's main street. City planner Walter Blucher solved the church problem by, in his own words, "cutting chunks off the front" of each sanctuary. For this, he recalled decades later, "I was consigned to hell at least once a week," but in Detroit, even the clergy had to make way for the automobile.[23]

The Home Front

By the close of the Thirties, Detroit was humming again, and the fledgling United Auto Workers was delivering on its pledge to "make Detroit a union town" by organizing workers for shop-floor solidarity. At the same time that federal policy helped to unite workers in the factories, however, it reinforced divisions at the neighborhood level. In 1939, as the drumbeat of war accelerated in Europe, the appraisal department of Franklin Roosevelt's Home Owners Loan Corporation completed an exhaustive neighborhood-by-neighborhood assessment of housing in Detroit. Created in Roosevelt's First Hundred Days to save homeowners from foreclosure, the HOLC provided refinancing assistance for one in ten of the nation's homeowners in its first two years of operation. To determine who would be eligible for a loan, the HOLC prepared "Residential Security Maps" for every major city in the nation.[24]

The street map the HOLC used as the base map for their assessment, prepared by Hearne Brothers of Detroit, showed that in spite of the lost years of the Depression, the urbanized area of the region was already approaching the limits of the 10-mile circle the Rapid Transit Commission had plotted for 1950. Some of the outlying neighborhoods within the city limit had not yet been built up, but the great majority had. In Oakland County, a huge area along Woodward Avenue stretching north to Fifteen Mile Road had already been laid out with streets, although owing to the Depression, much of this expanse was still "very sparsely settled."
As defined by the nation's realtors, "residential security" had as much or more to do with the kind of people in a neighborhood as the condition of the neighborhood's physical structures. The HOLC systematized their practices nationwide. On the standardized form they completed

[23] Perry L. Norton, "Woodward's Vision for Detroit," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 25.2 (1986), 165.
[24] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 196.

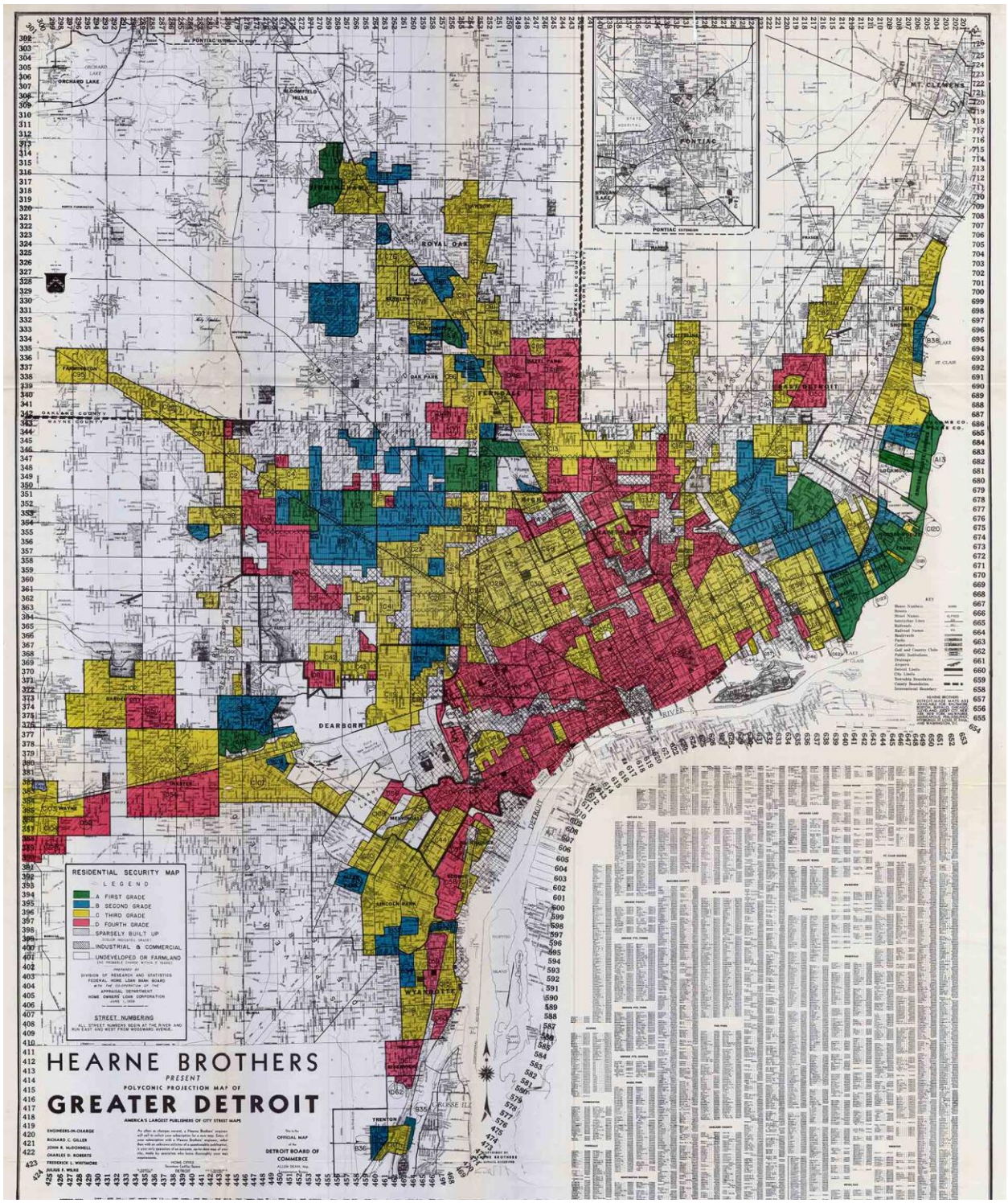

Figure 1.5. Home Owners Loan Corporation residential security map of greater Detroit, 1939. Robert K. Nelson et al., "Mapping Inequality," *American Panorama,* ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/, accessed January 22, 2021.

for each neighborhood, assessors began by noting the characteristics of its people, including their "class and occupation;" the percentage of "foreign families;" the presence or absence of "Negro" settlement; and any "shifting or infiltration." They then proceeded to assess the condition and market value of the neighborhood's housing stock, and concluded by assigning it one of four grades, from A to D, marked on the map in bright colors: green, blue, yellow, and red.

The HOLC map for Detroit offered a vivid portrayal of the centrifugal city's rapidly changing pattern of settlement. Nearly every neighborhood within the three-mile circle of Grand Boulevard was colored red, or "Hazardous." The assessors' descriptions cited vacancy, vandalism, and the presence of industry, but most of all the "grade of residents." East of Woodward Avenue, a "slum area" stretching north to the Boulevard was inhabited almost entirely by "Negroes."[25] To the west of downtown, the assessors noted the Corktown area near Tiger Stadium had filled with "undesirable aliens…mixed Europeans, Chinese, Mexican, Maltese."[26]

Beyond the Boulevard, most neighborhoods were colored yellow: Grade C, for "Definitely Declining." This description encompassed most of the area that had been built up in the boom years of the 1910s and 1920s, a section that included single-family homes of all sizes, two-family and four-family flats, and handsome apartment buildings on the larger thoroughfares. Even the Boston-Edison district, where Couzens, Waldon and other automobile barons had built their mansions a quarter-century earlier, received a grade of C. "Better element moving out," the assessors observed, citing "a few negroes" east of Woodward and a "high percent Jewish" to the west.[27]

The "better element" of Detroit now made their homes in a band of exclusive neighborhoods towards the outer limits of the central city. The names of these neighborhoods—Palmer Woods, Sherwood Forest, Rosedale Park—advertised their remove from the clamor of Detroit's industry. Their curving tree-lined streets suggested a quiet country setting, even as the great radial highways nearby provided convenient access to downtown offices and distant factories. The HOLC assessors favorably cited the "highly restricted," "homogeneous" character

[25] Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., "Mapping Inequality," *American Panorama,* ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/, accessed January 22, 2021, Detroit area description D31.
[26] Nelson et al., "Mapping Inequality," Detroit area description D28.
[27] Nelson et al., "Mapping Inequality," Detroit area description C31.

of these neighborhoods, whose residents consisted of as much as 98% native-born Americans, if the assessments are to be believed.[28]

The HOLC map also charted a growing constellation of suburban development radiating beyond the Detroit city limits, largely along the super-highways that the Inter-County Highway Commissions had laid out over a decade earlier. These suburban neighborhoods, many platted but only partially built up, spanned all four categories of the HOLC code. The community of Inkster along Michigan Avenue, populated mostly by workers at the Ford Rouge plant who were barred from living in all-white Dearborn, was "occupied almost entirely by Negroes" and characterized by "garage type houses," mostly without the benefit of sewer service. "There is little future for an area as poorly built as this one," the assessors concluded, rating the area fourth grade.[29] The all-white (increasingly Polish) community of Hazel Park in Oakland County, with unpaved streets and "scattered poor houses," was "convenient to the Chevrolet plant for employment" but suffered from infrequent (every half hour) bus service on its main thoroughfare of John R Street.[30] Other suburban communities were among the most exclusive in the metropolitan area, few more so than the Grosse Pointe towns along Lake St. Clair to the city's east. Grosse Pointe Shores, zoned entirely residential, and consisting entirely of native-born Americans, was considered "the most exclusive in the entire Detroit area."[31] Several new communities in Oakland County also showed promise, like a new residential section of the village of Birmingham. Though nine miles north of the Detroit city limit, it was located along the Woodward Avenue superhighway, and the assessors noted that its residents could reach downtown Detroit in 40 minutes on the Grand Trunk Railroad's commuter trains.[32]

By opening the path to homeownership for millions of middle-class and working-class Americans, while conditioning mortgage lending on neighborhood segregation, the federal government underwrote the expansion of all-white suburbs and set the stage for the transformation of Detroit politics in the 1940s. Local politics in the nation's most prominent bastion of industrial unionism would increasingly revolve not around the vision of working-class solidarity but the defense of neighborhood racial segregation. Edward Connor, a former New Deal official and housing advocate who would become Detroit's most prominent advocate of

[28] Nelson et al., "Mapping Inequality," Detroit area description A-1
[29] Nelson et al., "Mapping Inequality," Detroit area description D-54.
[30] Nelson et al., "Mapping Inequality," Detroit area description D-49.
[31] Nelson et al., "Mapping Inequality," Detroit area description A-13.
[32] Nelson et al., "Mapping Inequality," Detroit area description A-7.

metropolitan planning, bore firsthand witness to the rise of the politics of the racialized "home front."

The U.S. mobilization for World War Two brought the Motor City roaring back to life. It also helped redraw the map of the metropolitan region. Well before Pearl Harbor, bulldozers were clearing the way for a series of suburban military plants that would begin to redraw Detroit's industrial geography. By January 1941, the steel skeleton of the U.S. Army Tank Arsenal had taken shape in a snowy field in Warren Township, north of the Detroit city limit along the Grand Trunk Railroad in southern Macomb County.[33] That month, the Navy awarded a contract to Hudson Motor Car Company to build a gun component factory in nearby Center Line.[34] In April, workers broke ground for the Ford Motor Company's B-24 bomber plant near Ypsilanti, straddling the border of Wayne County and Washtenaw County twenty-five miles west of Detroit.[35]

As migrants streamed into Detroit seeking work, the city suffered an extreme shortage of housing. No one was more affected than Detroit's fast-growing black community, which made up nearly ten percent of Detroit's population by 1940 but remained largely confined to the city's inner east side ghetto.[36] In 1941, the federal government proposed a two-hundred-unit housing complex for black occupancy, the Sojourner Truth Homes, in the Seven Mile-Fenelon neighborhood on Detroit's northeast side. While the site was adjacent to the middle-class black enclave of Conant Gardens, much of the surrounding area was white—predominantly Polish. The proposal sparked vociferous opposition, especially in light of the Federal Housing Administration's decision to cease issuing mortgage loans to homeowners in the area in the aftermath of the decision to build public housing there.[37]

The Sojourner Truth proposal inaugurated a protracted battle over segregation and public housing in Detroit that would outlast U.S. involvement in World War Two. Leading the charge for black occupancy at Sojourner Truth was a coalition of white liberals and leftists, including

[33] Charles K. Hyde, *Images from the Arsenal of Democracy* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2014), 4-5.
[34] Hyde, *Images from the Arsenal of* Democracy, 206.
[35] Sarah Jo Peterson, *Planning the Home Front: Building Bombers and Communities at Willow Run* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 39.
[36] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 23.
[37] At first, the black residents of Conant Gardens joined their white neighbors in opposing the Sojourner Truth proposal. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 73.

Figure 1.6. Black tenants of the Sojourner Truth Homes, flanked by Detroit police, flee a white mob on move-in day, February 28, 1942. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

Housing Commission director and then Councilman George Edwards, and Detroit's black political leadership, a coalition staffed by a young labor activist named Coleman Alexander Young.[38] On the other side were white Detroit homeowners. It was not an equal contest. As Edwards wrote:

> The Negroes have all logic, decency, civilization and ethics on their side. The whites have a simple argument "We don't want Niggers living near us" and probably a majority of Detroit citizens on theirs.[39]

[38] Coleman A. Young and Lonnie Wheeler, *Hard Stuff: The Autobiography of Mayor Coleman Young* (New York: Viking, 1994), 48.
[39] Mary M. Stolberg, *Bridging the River of Hatred: The Pioneering Efforts of Detroit Police Commissioner George Edwards* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 72.

Move-in day—February 28, 1942—turned into a melee as white mobs attacked the black tenants. Detroit's Mayor Jeffries was a liberal who had supported black occupancy for Sojourner Truth, but in the aftermath of the riots, he and Housing Commission Director Josephine Gomon put forward a policy that in future, no public housing project would change "the racial pattern of a neighborhood." Edwards was the sole member of Council to vote against this mandate for segregation.[40]

Edward Connor, who in the two decades that followed would do more than any other politician to chart a course for metropolitan governance in Detroit, arrived in the Motor City in 1943, at a time when racial tension in the city had reached fever pitch. The Sojourner Truth housing battle paled in comparison to the terrible riots of 1943, which left thirty-four people dead. 17 of the victims—all black—had been shot dead by Detroit police.[41] Born in Chicago and educated at Notre Dame, Connor had spent nearly a decade as a New Deal official, serving the Works Progress Administration and the Federal Works Agency.[42] He came to Detroit to accept the directorship of the Citizens Housing & Planning Council, a local reform group focused on "slum clearance" and public housing. Founded in 1937 and composed primarily of professionals in related fields, the CHPC billed itself as the "VOICE OF THE INARTICULATE," an advocate for the thousands of Detroiters living in substandard housing.[43] Its members viewed the problem as essentially one of improper planning, although the CHPC singled out Detroit's black "slum" areas for special attention.[44] However, Connor soon found that Detroit's housing problem could not be easily disentangled from the politics of racial segregation.

"A serious housing crisis exists in the Metropolitan Detroit area," Connor told the *Detroit Free Press* in January 1945. "The shortage is particularly acute for Negroes." This posed both a "health menace" and "an increasing handicap to vital war production." To address the crisis, the CHPC urged the development of additional "Negro housing," arguing that there were 16

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[40] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban* Crisis, 73-4; June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2013 [1997]), 24-5; Stolberg, 73.
[41] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 29.
[42] 'A Detroit Political Star Sets," *Detroit Free Press*, February 20, 1967.
[43] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 61-62.
[44] One of the CHPC's first projects, in 1938, was an analysis of the outlying black enclave at Eight Mile and Wyoming, near the city's edge, which it described as a "suburban slum." Prepared by a white University of Michigan sociologist, the report argued for relocating the residents to a "comparable area" where blacks had already settled and clearing the area for white homeownership, "to keep this deteriorated area from spreading." Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 67-8.

potential sites "which meet local policy in regard to not disturbing the racial compositions of neighborhoods."[45] Like other liberals, given the depth of white resistance to neighborhood desegregation, Connor was willing to accept segregated housing for blacks over no housing at all.[46] As with the Sojourner Truth Homes, however, white neighborhood groups opposed new housing projects for black Detroiters even when they were located adjacent to existing areas of black settlement.

Of the 16 sites identified by the CHPC, the Detroit Housing Commission came to focus its efforts for a new black housing project on a location near Oakwood Avenue on Detroit's far southwest side, where the Federal Housing Administration had already approved a small black subdivision in 1944. Yet this proposal met massive resistance from the adjacent neighborhood, composed mostly of first and second-generation immigrants who loudly asserted their "white" identity and their "right" to an all-white neighborhood in hundreds of letters to the Detroit Common Council. The Council held its first hearing on the proposal on March 9, 1945. The Detroit Police directed most supporters of the proposal to stay home "in order to prevent possible racial disturbances," but Connor and a small group of liberals, including clergy and a representative of the League of Women Voters, attended to speak in favor of the Oakwood plan.[47]

They were outnumbered. A crowd of thousands had descended on Detroit's City Hall. Louis J. Borolo, a local olive oil distributor and president of the Oakwood Blue Jackets, told Council members that they owed it to the men fighting overseas to preserve segregation at home. "There are 1,500 blue stars in the windows of homes of that neighborhood," he said. "Those stars represent soldiers waiting to come back to the same neighborhood they left." Borolo assured Council that he was not arguing against black Detroiters' right to decent housing, only that the residents' right to an all-white neighborhood came first. "There are a great body of respectable hard-working Negroes," he said. "We respect their rights," Borolo claimed—but, he added, "we

[45] Hal Curtis, "Negroes Face Housing Crisis," *Detroit Free Press*, January 14, 1945.
[46] See June Manning Thomas, "Josephine Gomon Plans for Detroit's Rehabilitation," *Journal of Planning History* 17.2 (2018), 97-117.
[47] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 77-80; Leo Donovan, *Detroit Free Press*, "Council Weighs Proposals for Negro Housing," March 10, 1945, 1.

expect them to respect ours." Council delayed taking action. On March 20, it rejected the Oakwood proposal.[48]

In the years that followed, Connor witnessed the transformation of Detroit politics as the "defense" of all-white neighborhoods eclipsed other issues in local government. Mayor Jeffries, who had previously run as "Mayor of all the people," won re-election against a left-wing challenger in the fall of 1945 on a platform opposing "mixed housing." Journalist Henry Lee Moon, writing in the NAACP magazine *Crisis*, charged that Jeffries had taken up the cause of "our more refined fascists, the big money interests, and the precarious middle class whose sole inalienable possession is a white skin."[49]

In 1948, when a seat opened on Common Council, Connor decided to enter the fray of Detroit politics himself. Connor's work with the CHPC had positioned him well for the campaign. The organization's board of directors included a who's who of Detroit's leading liberals, including Victor Reuther of the United Auto Workers; George Schermer, director of the Mayor's Inter-Racial Committee; "labor priest" Father Raymond Clancy; retired rabbi Leo Franklin; and Louis Martin, publisher of the *Michigan Chronicle,* Detroit's largest black newspaper.[50] Connor's bid for Council received support from the fledgling Detroit chapter of Americans for Democratic Action and an inter-racial Committee of 101 Women,[51] and he won with the most votes of any council candidate in Detroit history.[52] Yet the following year's election extinguished any hopes Connor might have had of reversing Detroit's lurch to the right.

The 1949 mayoral contest pitted former Burroughs Corporation executive and longtime City Treasurer Albert Cobo against Connor's leading liberal colleague on Council, George Edwards, who had worked to ensure black occupancy of the Sojourner Truth Homes as Detroit Housing Commissioner eight years earlier. Despite an unprecedented campaign push for Edwards by the UAW and the Democratic Party, Cobo swept to victory, winning 45% of the

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[48] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 77-80; Leo Donovan, *Detroit Free Press*, "Council Weighs Proposals for Negro Housing," March 10, 1945, 1. The Oakwood Blue Jackets were a predominantly Italian-American athletic club. On the Blue Jackets and Borolo, see Greg Casadei, *A Gun and Cherries in the Bucket of Blood: The Americanization of an Italian Family and Lessons Learned* (XLibris LLC, 2014), 174-177.

[49] Stolberg, *Bridging the River of Hatred*, 65; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 80-1.

[50] Citizens Housing and Planning Council, *Housing and Planning News,* March-April 1947, in Box 20, "Press Releases 1944-6," ECP.

[51] "Candidates Picked by Detroit ADA," *Detroit Free Press,* August 20, 1948, 12. The committee included, among others, United Auto Workers activist Mildred Jeffrey and Beulah Whitby, the first black supervisor in the Detroit Welfare Department.

[52] "A Detroit Political Star Sets," *Detroit Free Press,* February 20, 1967, 12D. This figure also reflects the fact that Detroit's population in 1948 was the greatest it had ever been.

vote in a four-way primary contest and 60% in the general election.[53]As one organizer explained in a postmortem meeting, "George was beaten by the housing program." Doubling down on Jeffries' race-baiting strategy, Cobo had pledged to oppose "Negro invasion" of all-white neighborhoods.[54] He won every white precinct in the city.[55] Racial segregation, not class solidarity, had become the axis around which Detroit politics revolved.

As Mayor, Cobo enthusiastically carried out the program of "slum clearance" that the CHPC had urged under Connor—while largely rejecting the other component of the CHPC's program, the construction of new public housing. Among Cobo's first actions as mayor was to veto eight of twelve proposed public housing sites, most of them at the city's outer edge.[56] Meanwhile, armed with federal "urban renewal" funds, the city forged ahead with the "Detroit Plan," a proposal for the clearance and redevelopment of the Black Bottom area—one hundred acres of the city's most densely populated area—first developed under Mayor Jeffries. Evictions began in 1950, even as housing advocates protested that without more public housing construction, the "slum clearance" they had advocated would only exacerbate the housing crisis for black Detroiters. "With no decent place to move," one predicted, "9,000 people are going to have to crowd into already overpopulated old houses and shacks."[57]

Figure 1.7a and 1.7b. Adversaries in City Hall: Edward Connor (left, 1951), and Mayor Albert Cobo (right, 1956), pictured at Detroit's first expressway interchange. *Detroit Free Press* and Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

[53] Stolberg, *Bridging the River of Hatred*, 90; Robert J. Mowitz and Deil S. Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1962), 646.
[54] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 82; Stolberg, *Bridging the River of Hatred*, 88.
[55] Stolberg, *Bridging the River of Hatred* , 91.
[56] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 85.
[57] Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, 59.

With the support of Democratic Governor G. Mennen Williams, Cobo also prevailed on the Michigan Legislature to permit the city, county and state to issue thirty-year revenue bonds, based on anticipated gas tax collections, in order to finance expressway construction. The war effort had given rise to Detroit's first limited-access expressways: the Davison Expressway, an east-west trench dug through Highland Park, and the Willow Run Expressway, a suburban umbilical cord linking the Willow Run bomber plant to Ford's River Rouge complex in Dearborn. The new revenue bonds enabled Cobo to accelerate the city's extension of the expressway network, bringing the Willow Run expressway (later the Edsel Ford) east across the city of Detroit and building a new expressway, named for former Mayor John C. Lodge, that speeded travel between the downtown business district and the wealthy residential areas of northwest Detroit. The expressways, too—dubbed "Cobo's canyons"—disproportionately displaced black Detroiters. Although the Lodge mostly traversed white areas of the city, the Ford slashed across the black West Side enclave near Grand River and Warren Avenue, a haven of middle-class prosperity.[58] Worse was yet to come: the proposed Hastings-Oakland Expressway, still in the planning stages in 1950, was slated to eliminate the Hastings Street commercial district, heart of the Paradise Valley area.[59]

The effects of "urban renewal" on Detroit's black community were profound. Coleman Young, who had been raised in Black Bottom and helped lead the fight for black occupancy at the Sojourner Truth Homes, reflected on the destruction many decades later:

> My father's tailor shop was plowed under in 1950. Maben's barbershop bit the dust a little while later. Ours was the first neighborhood to be eliminated, with long stretches of stores and houses being demolished seemingly at random. The swath of destruction was broad and frightfully unpredictable. It took every nearby structure that meant anything to me, with the exception of St. Joseph's Church on my grandmother's street.

Edward Connor criticized the Cobo administration's "rosy picture" of the city's efforts to assist Black Bottom residents in relocating.[60] Indeed, some residents did not even know

[58] Parts of the West Side enclave grew less exclusive as more residents crowded in during the 1940s, but through 1950, it remained relatively prosperous as a whole. See Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 38, and Map 7.2(a), 200.
[59] Roger Biles, "Expressways before the Interstates: The Case of Detroit, 1945-1956," *Journal of Urban History* 40.5 (2014), 843-854.
[60] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 50.

Figure 1.8 Gratiot urban renewal area, formerly Black Bottom, after clearance, 1950s, looking northwest towards Eastern Market and Brewster-Douglass housing projects (upper right). St. Joseph's Church is visible at the edge of the cleared on Antietam Street at upper right, where future Detroit Mayor Coleman Young lived when his family arrived in Detroit. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

they were eligible for relocation assistance. Some who did receive assistance were placed in deteriorating apartments with crumbling ceilings and disconnected plumbing.[61]

Many of the refugees from urban renewal joined the growing exodus of black Detroiters out of the East Side ghetto to the Twelfth Street area, an area of Detroit's Near West Side that

[61] Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, 60.

was in the process of being vacated by its predominantly Jewish residents. In Coleman Young's estimation, the Twelfth Street area "trebled the problems of Black Bottom while inheriting little of its charisma." Young was one of the luckier newcomers: he "integrated" a previously all-white block of Collingwood Street on the north end of the Twelfth Street area, near the mansions of the Boston-Edison district. For his one-bedroom apartment there, he was charged twice the rent that the previous tenants had paid.[62]

The Gratiot "renewal area" lay fallow for years, a bad joke on the outcome of Connor's efforts on the "home front." As a member of Detroit Common Council, his housing agenda stymied by Mayor Cobo, Connor increasingly directed his attention outward, away from the segregationist stalemate of city politics towards the new frontiers of metropolitan growth. Half a mile to the east of the ruins of Black Bottom, on the tenth floor of a downtown skyscraper, a small group of planners were sketching the beginnings of a regional plan for metropolitan Detroit.

A Plan for the Postwar Metropolis

"Detroit was established more than two hundred years ago," the spring 1947 edition of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council's *Housing and Planning News* stated with some consternation. "Isn't it about time we grew up to acknowledgement of the fact that city and region are interdependent, and that planning and development for one, must include planning and development for both?" The cause for the Council's impatience was the delay in the creation of a Regional Planning Commission for metropolitan Detroit. The Michigan Legislature had passed a law authorizing such commissions in 1945, with backing from the Greater Detroit Board of Commerce. Yet Mayor Jeffries had held up the proposal "on a question of mechanics: how the commission is to be set up." The CHPC hoped for timely action. A Regional Planning Commission, it argued, was needed to "(1) study the region's assets and liabilities; (2) do something about the latter; and (3) coordinate the planning of Detroit with that of surrounding towns, villages and townships."[63]

[62] Coleman Young and Lonnie Wheeler, *Hard Stuff: The Autobiography of Mayor Coleman Young* (New York: Viking, 1994), 147-8.
[63] Citizens Housing and Planning Council, *Housing and Planning News,* March-April 1947, in Box 20, "Press Releases 1944-6," ECP.

As the war had drawn to a close, and Americans anticipated a new era of postwar suburbanization, metropolitan planning had become a subject of discussion in Detroit and around the nation.[64] Already, in January 1942, Mayor Jeffries had convened a Regional Defense Planning Committee for the Metropolitan Area, with representatives from localities across the region.[65] In 1943, the American Society of Planning Officials sponsored a national competition seeking the best proposal for a "regional council" for metropolitan planning.[66] The experience of the New Deal and World War Two, moreover, convinced many corporate leaders that public structures for planning could not only coexist with but facilitate the private quest for profit. Indeed, the Greater Detroit Board of Commerce had been the key actor in the passage of Michigan's Regional Planning Commission Act, most likely with the urging of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council.[67]

The Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission (RPC) finally came into being in June of 1947, and opened its office in downtown Detroit's Cadillac Square Building the following May.[68] Initial funding for the RPC had come from the private sector as well as the State of Michigan,[69] and the RPC's composition suggested its orientation towards the needs of business as well as the broader public. Half its forty-six members consisted of public officials, including such key infrastructure providers as Wayne County Road Commission chief engineer Leroy Smith; Detroit water department manager Laurence Lenhardt; and the ubiquitous Edward Connor, who held a seat on the Executive Committee. The other half consisted of various civic leaders, primarily businessmen, among them Foster Winter, treasurer of the Hudson department store company; Victor Reuther of the United Auto Workers; and Nash-Kelvinator executive George Romney.[70]

The RPC's jurisdiction indicated how the wartime investment in suburban industry had expanded the boundaries of the "region": in addition to Wayne, Oakland and Macomb County,

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[64] Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 433-5.
[65] Sarah Jo Peterson, *Planning the Home Front: Building Bombers and Communities at Willow Run* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 113.
[66] Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, 430.
[67] Thomas, Nicholas Patrick, "The Roundtables of Metroplex: A Comparison of the Supervisors Inter-County Committee (Detroit), the Metropolitan Regional Council (New York), and the Metropolitan Washington (D.C.) Council of Governments" (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 1968), 32.
[68] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Conference Proceedings: 1952 Spring Conference on Local Planning and Zoning," 1952, iii.
[69] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Conference Proceedings: 1952 Spring Conference on Local Planning and Zoning," 1952, 2.
[70] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "1949 Annual Report," 3-4.

the RPC included the four easternmost townships of Washtenaw County and the city of Ypsilanti, so as to encompass the area of Willow Run.[71] Over this sprawling region, containing hundreds of separate cities and townships, the RPC exercised no formal political authority. Per their enabling legislation, regional planning commissions did not supplant local governments in any way, nor did they govern planning by county or state bodies like the County Road Commission or the State Highway Department. Instead, they functioned simply as clearinghouses for research and discussion among their members—who were also responsible for funding them. As Edward Connor, then serving as RPC Chairman, noted in 1952: "the Regional Planning Commission is not an operating agency. It has no power to impose. The only power [the RPC] has might be called the power of the dictatorship of a good idea."[72]

As a result, the RPC moved with caution with respect to the local governments and businesses who were, after all, its sponsors. In the words of its staff:

> From the beginning, it was our intention to sacrifice speed wherever necessary for integration of operation with local government and private development. We took our time getting the feel of the job, added staff slowly, depended almost entirely upon committees for physical information and specialized knowledge, and emphasized local participation in the fact gathering and study.[73]

As RPC director T. Ledyard Blakeman stated, "we knew that we had to keep in touch with the local governments of the region if we were to stay alive, if our planning was to be realistic and if the plan was to be used."[74] The "dictatorship of a good idea" was not much of a dictatorship at all.

Blakeman, a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who had previously worked for state planning boards in Virginia and New Jersey,[75] attempted to approach the problem of regional planning on a piece-by-piece basis. The Regional Planning Commission divided the region into 19 smaller subunits, or "development areas." In each of these, the RPC attempted to organize a "development area council" consisting of delegates from each local

[71] Thomas, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 33.
[72] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Conference Proceedings: 1952 Spring Conference on Local Planning and Zoning," 1952, 2.
[73] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Conference Proceedings: 1952 Spring Conference on Local Planning and Zoning," 1952, iii.
[74] T. Ledyard Blakeman, "Detroit's Regional Plan," *National Municipal Review,* October 1955, 468.
[75] Myers, William Starr, *Prominent Families of New Jersey, Volume I* (Clearfield Publishing Company, 2000 [1945]), 455.

government.[76] Blakeman confessed this was a "rather arbitrary solution," but hoped it might help to begin the process of building a regional consciousness among the public. "[I]t is too much to ask a citizen of a one-square-mile town to recognize his dependence on a two-thousand-square-mile metropolitan area," he stated. "If, however, you can get him to look at his neighbors in a two-hundred-square-mile development area, you may get him to look at the whole two thousand square miles."[77]

Figure 1.9. Regional Planning Commission Director T. Ledyard Blakeman (in bow tie, pointing at a map of the region) with officials of suburban Oak Park and Royal Oak. Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "1949 Annual Report," p. 6.

At the RPC's May 1952 conference on local planning and zoning, held at the new Veterans Memorial Building in downtown Detroit, Blakeman announced that the next twelve to

[76] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Conference Proceedings: 1952 Spring Conference on Local Planning and Zoning," 1952, 6.
[77] T. Ledyard Blakeman, "Detroit's Regional Plan," *National Municipal Review*, October 1955, 498.

eighteen months would be "the crucial year" for the organization, as it worked to feed the work of its committees into its first Regional Land Use Plan: a plan that would be both "technically sound" and "acceptable to the people of the Region." Fittingly for Detroit, the first stage would be charting the possibilities for new industrial development in relation to water, sewage and transportation infrastructure. The threat of nuclear attack, Blakeman noted, gave further impetus to the industrial decentralization already underway: "The Federal Government insists that as a defense measure all new plants producing critical materials be kept at least 10 miles from present concentrations of industry or major concentrations of population." The identification of sites for residential areas would follow industrial planning, recapitulating the basic sequence of Detroit's development: people following factories.[78]

The following year, the fifth annual report of the RPC overflowed with enthusiasm as it announced the conclusion of the regional planning process.

> There is unmistakable evidence that a turning point has been reached in helter-skelter, runaway physical development. This has exacted an enormous penalty from the people of this surging and dynamic Region for nearly a century. Within the next year the Commission expects to see materialize a definite pattern of enlightened social and economic growth. Such development would make possible a more pleasant and profitable way of life both for this generation and for those to come.

The inside cover of the report described "The Problem": "riotous, undirected growth," the "sum of a multitude of decisions" by manufacturers, individual families, and other private actors. "The vast majority of these decisions have been individual and unrelated," the report asserted; "few have been public or collective decisions."[79]

"None of us is opposed to growth and development," the authors hastened to add, "to expansion of the economic base and increase of the value-producing activities in the peripheral parts of the metropolitan area." Indeed, outward growth was both inevitable and desirable, since it promoted "discontinuance of high population concentrations and resulting congestion." Yet unplanned suburban growth could generate further traffic tie-ups, wasteful spending on infrastructure, even the specter of "rural slums and blighted industrial areas…no more to be desired in the periphery than in the center of a metropolitan area." Readers turned the page of the

[78] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Conference Proceedings: 1952 Spring Conference on Local Planning and Zoning," 1952, 4-5.
[79] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Annual Report," 1953, ECP, Box 20, "Reports."

report to reveal a fold-out, full-color depiction of "The Solution:" the regional land use plan for greater Detroit.

The plan sketched a new stage in Detroit's suburbanization. The great industrial corridors followed the railroad lines far into suburban Wayne and Macomb County. In between, wide swathes of residential development spilled a dozen miles beyond the limits of Detroit as far as Flat Rock at the southern boundary of Wayne County; Ypsilanti in Washtenaw County; and Macomb County's Selfridge Air Force Base on Lake St. Clair. The southeastern corner of Oakland County was entirely urbanized. Beyond it, a lower-density expanse of "rural non-farm residential" stretched through the county's lake country and encompassed Detroit's industrial satellite of Pontiac. An extensive highway system threaded its way throughout the entire metropolitan area, snaking out of Detroit's downtown core and encircling the central city in a series of beltways. At the periphery of the region, green recreational corridors curled through the remaining farmland.

The Regional Planning Commission, however, had no authority to ensure this plan for regional development actually unfolded. "If, after working with us to develop this plan, the people of a particular community don't like it, they don't have to do anything about it," Blakeman had assured local officials. The RPC would simply use it as a basis for planning with regard to other public infrastructure, including water and sewer systems, parks, and transportation. It also hoped that private industry and business would make use of the plan. Detroit Edison, for example, the region's primary electric utility, had donated $15,000 towards the preparation of the regional plan, seeing it as an aid to its own planning efforts. Finally, Blakeman hoped that local communities, "in the few cases where it is necessary," would modify their local zoning ordinances to conform to the Regional Plan.[80]

The most substantive accomplishment of the Regional Planning Commission, indeed, may have been the assistance it provided suburban communities in developing their local capacity for planning and zoning. Before World War Two, scarcely a dozen Detroit suburbs had incorporated as cities. Setting aside the enclaves of Highland Park and Hamtramck inside Detroit, and the General Motors satellite city of Pontiac in central Oakland County, Dearborn was the only suburb with more than 50,000 residents. Between 1940 and 1965, however, thirty-

[80] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Conference Proceedings: 1952 Spring Conference on Local Planning and Zoning," 1952, 5-6.

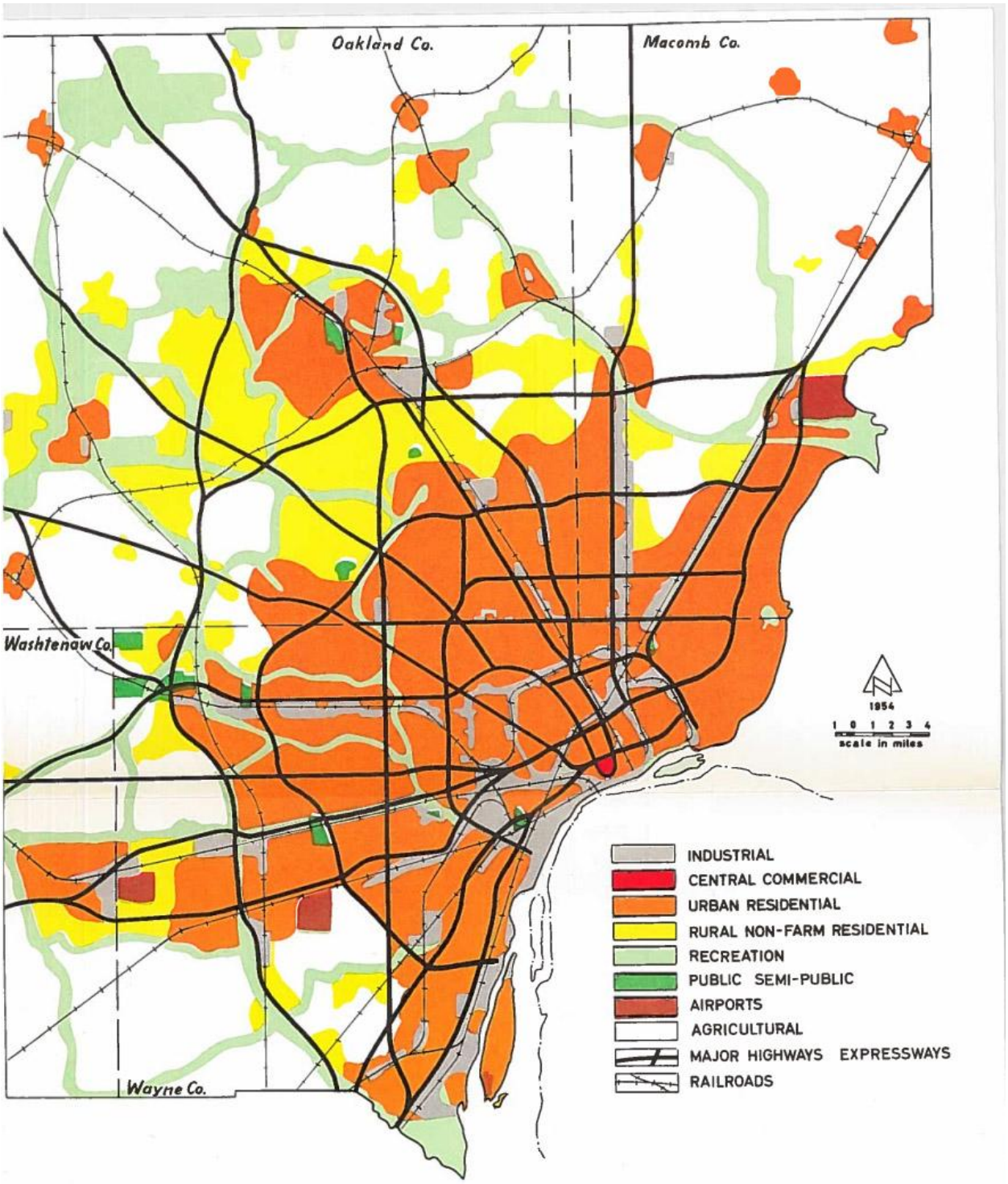

Figure 1.10. Regional Planning Commission plan for greater Detroit, 1953. Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Annual Report," 1953, in ECP, Box 20, "Reports."

one new suburban governments came into being, including both villages and cities, and ten villages re-incorporated as cities. From 1950 to 1965, the incorporations absorbed over 215

square miles, roughly doubling the amount of metropolitan land within city or village limits. By comparison, it had taken the city of Detroit over a century to reach its 139-square-mile extent.[81]

Incorporation gave the new communities planning and zoning powers, powers they used aggressively to control development and expand their tax base. The Regional Planning Commission vigorously promoted local planning and zoning, noting it gave local governments the means to "protect what you have and *promote what you want*."[82] Beginning in 1950, the Commission hosted annual metropolitan conferences on local planning and zoning. Focused on showing suburbs the ropes of the process, they covered such topics as "Making a Master Plan and Keeping it Up to Date," "State Laws Regarding Local Planning," and "How and When to Use Consultants."[83] At the 1958 annual conference, Paul M. Reid, who had succeeded Blakeman as director the previous year, described the proliferation of local planning capacity as one of the Regional Planning Commission's proudest accomplishments.

> Ten years ago this May, when the staff and office of the Regional Planning Commission were set up, there were just 27 local planning commissions in operation in the region. Today, we have 74! Ten years ago, Washtenaw had the only County Planning Commission in southeastern Michigan. Today such planning agencies have been established in Oakland, St. Clair, Livingston and Macomb Counties. Obviously, we cannot claim credit for all this upsurge of local and county planning commissions. But along with the tenor of the times, I think we can say honestly that we have made a real contribution to the understanding and civic atmosphere that foster the growth and operation of planning agencies.[84]

Despite its metropolitan scope, and its paeans to inter-governmental cooperation, the Regional Planning Commission ultimately served to facilitate local government control over land use, as David Freund has written, power that local governments typically used in competitive and exclusionary ways.[85]

There was one area of planning where the principle of "local control" counted for relatively little: highway planning. The Regional Planning Commission may have been justly

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[81] David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy & White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 217.
[82] David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property*, 226.
[83] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Conference Proceedings: 1952 Spring Conference on Local Planning and Zoning," 1952, iii-iv.
[84] Paul M. Reid, "Progress on the Comprehensive Regional Plan," in Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Conference Papers: 8th Annual Planning and Zoning Conference," May 1958, 16.
[85] David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property*, 226.

proud of its 1953 regional plan, but a pioneering regional study completed two years later was probably far more influential in shaping the actual growth of the region. This was the Detroit Metropolitan Area Traffic Study, prepared by actors who had considerably more power than the "dictatorship of a good idea," and few hesitations about its exercise: the region's highway engineers planning the routes of the new expressway system. The Rapid Transit Commission's guiding principle of 1925—"population follows transportation"—remained equally true three decades later. As the Rapid Transit Commission had suggested, it might be said that highway planning was the real basis of regional planning in metropolitan Detroit, even that the super-highways planned in the 1920s had more or less created the region as it existed in 1950. The original logo of the Regional Planning Commission, in fact, mapped out both its constituent units, the RPC's member counties, and the paths of the radial super-highways that had brought them together.[86]

The Detroit Metropolitan Area Traffic Study (DMATS) was financed by the region's three primary road-building agencies: the City of Detroit, the Wayne County Road Commission, and Michigan State Highway Department, in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads. Its purpose was to provide for the movement of people and vehicles throughout the metropolitan area "by thoroughly understanding the nature of the movement and then by devising the most effective highway plan to serve it," including both current and future travel demand. To chart the flow of traffic in the region required an extraordinary effort, including household surveys, interviews with truck drivers and taxi drivers, and roadside interviews of drivers. More than 200 people were employed in the project, which set a nationwide precedent for metropolitan transportation planning.[87]

The results of the study painted a striking portrait of traffic flow in the "exploding metropolis." Lines of movement surged outward from the center of the city, following the path of the radial super-highways. Furthermore, the study predicted that by 1980, the total vehicle miles travelled in the region would increase by 76 percent.[88] To serve this movement and avert gridlock, the study recommended a 200-mile network of expressways superimposed over the old

[86] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "1949 Annual Report," 1.
[87] "Detroit Metropolitan Area Traffic Study: Part 1: Data Summary and Interpretation," Michigan State Highway Department, July 1955. According to Edward Weiner, the Detroit study "put together all of the elements of an urban transportation study for the first time." Edward Weiner, *Urban Transportation Planning in the United States: An Historical Overview* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 26.
[88] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*¸403-4.

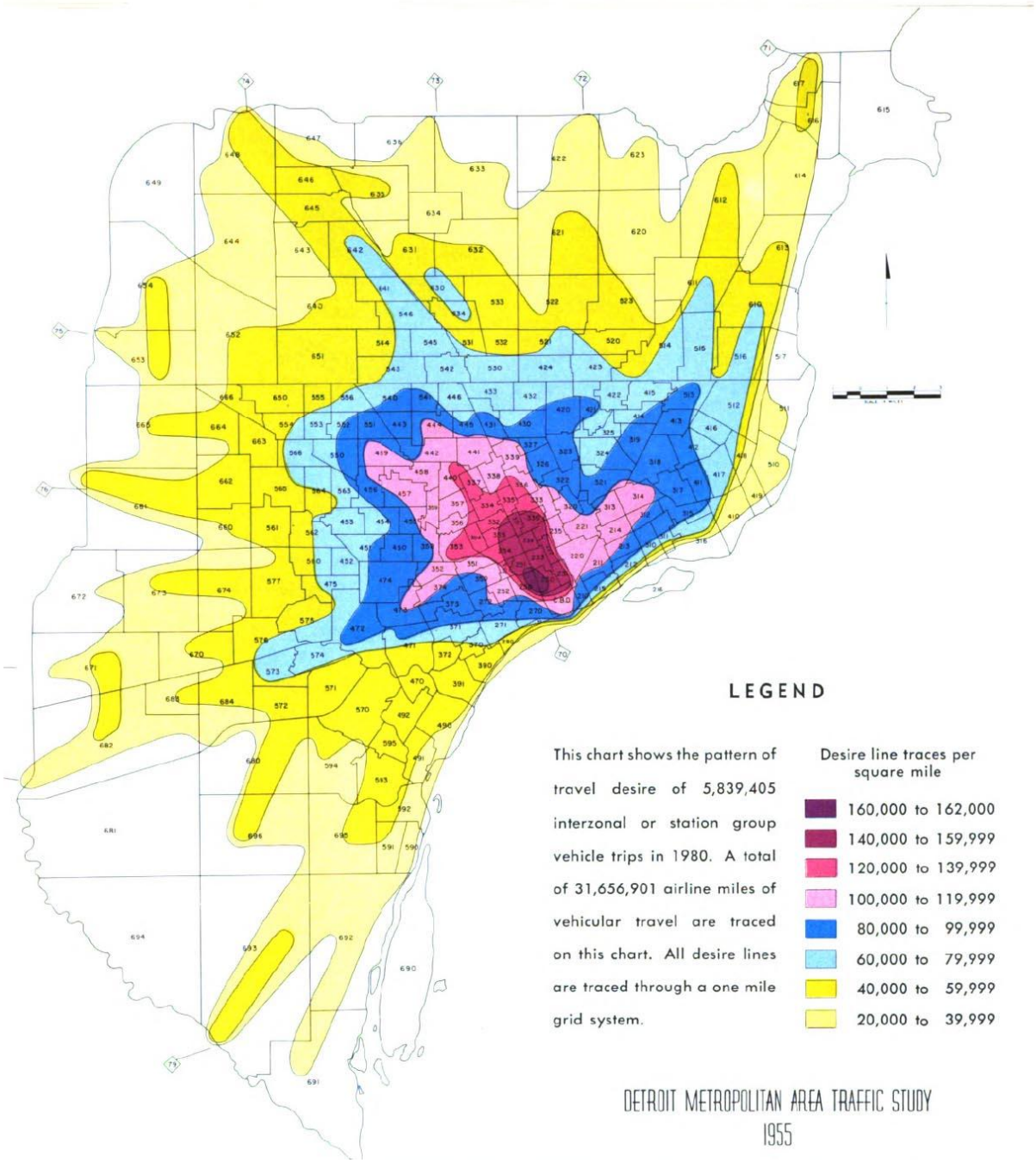

Figure 1.11. A lurid portrait of the exploding metropolis: 1980 "pattern of travel desire" forecasted by the 1956 Detroit Metropolitan Area Transportation Study, a pioneering effort in its field. "Detroit Metropolitan Area Traffic Study: Part 2: Future Traffic and A Long Range Expressway Plan," Michigan State Highway Department, March 1956.

radial super-highways, as well as expanded arterial surface streets. The total cost of the new expressways was estimated at $1.5 billion.[89]

On June 29, 1956, President Eisenhower signed the Interstate Highway Act into law, providing a new means of financing the expressway system.[90] By that time, the Lodge and Ford Expressways were well on their way across the city. The sprawling 14-bridge interchange between the two expressways, located near General Motors headquarters in the New Center area, had opened to the public in the fall of 1955.[91] With the federal government now picking up 90 percent of the Interstate tab, the stage was set for accelerated highway construction in the years to come.

Speaking of the RPC's 1953 Regional Land Use Plan, T. Ledyard Blakeman had said that "if the people of a particular community don't like it, they don't have to do anything about it." A different principle operated with regard to expressways. Much of the public, of course, welcomed the expressways, the latest step towards retooling Detroit around the automobile. Even in the Motor City, however, particular alignments drew opposition. The first sections of the Ford and Lodge Expressway had traversed older, predominantly working-class areas of the inner city; as expressway planning continued, however, wealthier neighborhoods found themselves in the planners' path. Yet even those communities found the highway juggernaut a nearly irresistible force.

In 1953, the City Council of the newly incorporated suburb of Harper Woods, a three-square-mile patch of modest homes at Detroit's northeast corner, passed a resolution declaring its opposition to the extension of the Ford Expressway through the city, as the State Highway Department's preferred route of Harper Avenue would eliminate the city's namesake commercial strip.[92] State Highway Commissioner Charles Ziegler, asked whether he could build without the city's consent, politely replied that "we would much rather sit down and work it out with the city officials."[93] There was little question who had the upper hand, as the City of Detroit was committed to the Harper Avenue route and the road itself was already under the jurisdiction of

[89] "Detroit Metropolitan Area Traffic Study: Part 2: Future Traffic and A Long Range Expressway Plan," Michigan State Highway Department, March 1956, 116.
[90] Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989, Revised Edition* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1990 [1979]), 92.
[91] Michigan Department of Transportation, "History & Culture: I-94 EB: I-94 Ramp to M-10," https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9623_11154_11188-29426--,00.html, accessed June 15, 2020.
[92] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 472.
[93] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 501.

the Wayne County Road Commission, a close ally of the State Highway Commission.[94] The Joseph Hudson Company, Detroit's flagship department store chain, also made it known that its plans for a giant shopping center in Harper Woods—following up on the success of its Northland Center in Southfield—depended on a speedy resolution of the expressway alignment.[95] After the election of a new Harper Woods City Council majority in 1955, the expressway went forward as proposed.[96]

In 1958, on Detroit's wealthy northwest side, the extension of the Lodge Expressway drew resistance from residents and business owners who feared it would damage property values along James Couzens Highway, a tree-lined boulevard that formed the area's main commercial thoroughfare and provided a "prestige address for business firms."[97] Irving Rubin, the State Highway Department representative assigned the task of selling the proposal, went to considerable lengths to placate residents. The state even hired the famed Detroit architect Minoru Yamasaki to beautify its proposal for a double-decked expressway that would avoid demolitions along Couzens and preserve surface streets for local access on either side of the new thoroughfare.[98] At the end of the day, however, Rubin made little effort to hide the state's overriding interest in getting the expressway built. "May I congratulate you on the campaign you have mounted against us," he told opponents at a public hearing in Detroit's new City-County Building. "I wish you ill luck, but I do congratulate you."[99] The double-deck proposal was ultimately abandoned in favor of a below-grade design, but the expressway moved forward with majority support from Detroit Common Council.[100]

As the super-highways constructed in the Twenties and Thirties had structured the urbanization of metropolitan Detroit in the decades that followed, so would the postwar expressway building boom guide the region's growth through the latter half of the century. The Regional Planning Commission could only set forth a vision for regional development. The highway planners could get it built, constructing the circulatory system of the metropolitan area around the singular value of the motoring public's need for speed.

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[94] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 472.
[95] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 496.
[96] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 510-11.
[97] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 414.
[98] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 422.
[99] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 430-1.
[100] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 455.

Next to the highway planners, the most powerful actors in the development of Detroit in the Fifties were probably Detroit's automakers themselves. Before the Depression, the first generation of automobile executives had laid the blueprint for a centrifugal city and carved out the original industrial suburbs of Dearborn, Highland Park and Hamtramck in its midst. In the boom years after 1945, the Big Three continued to drive the suburbanization of the region as they relocated their assembly lines beyond the boundaries of Detroit. Automobile production increasingly shifted out of Michigan entirely in the years after World War Two, in part as a response to federal industrial decentralization policy and union militancy in Detroit,[101] yet auto plants remained a mainstay of the region's economy.

However, in the postwar years, more and more of these plants relocated to the suburbs. From 1947 to 1958 alone, the Big Three constructed twenty-five new suburban Detroit plants.[102] During the Korean War buildup, 92.5% of federal aid for equipment and new plant construction in metropolitan Detroit went to suburban sites.[103] In a Regional Planning Commission survey, manufacturers cited the lower tax rates and abundant land in suburban areas as their top reasons for relocating.[104] Some of the new plants were located in the inner suburbs: sites along the rail corridors that traversed the new cities of Warren and Livonia, for example, were particularly favored locations not far from the central city.[105] Others were far more distant, like the Ford plant in rural Wixom in central Oakland County, fifteen miles beyond the Detroit city limits on the Grand River super-highway.

The smaller, less capitalized automakers tended to remain in Detroit, being less able to afford new suburban facilities. By 1960, as General Motors and Ford jobs suburbanized, Chrysler had become the city of Detroit's largest employer, but it continued to shed jobs as it struggled to compete with its larger rivals. The city's remaining independent automakers rapidly disappeared. Following its merger with Studebaker, Packard shut down its 50-year-old, forty-

[101] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 140.
[102] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 128.
[103] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 140.
[104] Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, 74.
[105] See Table 4.1 in Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 97.

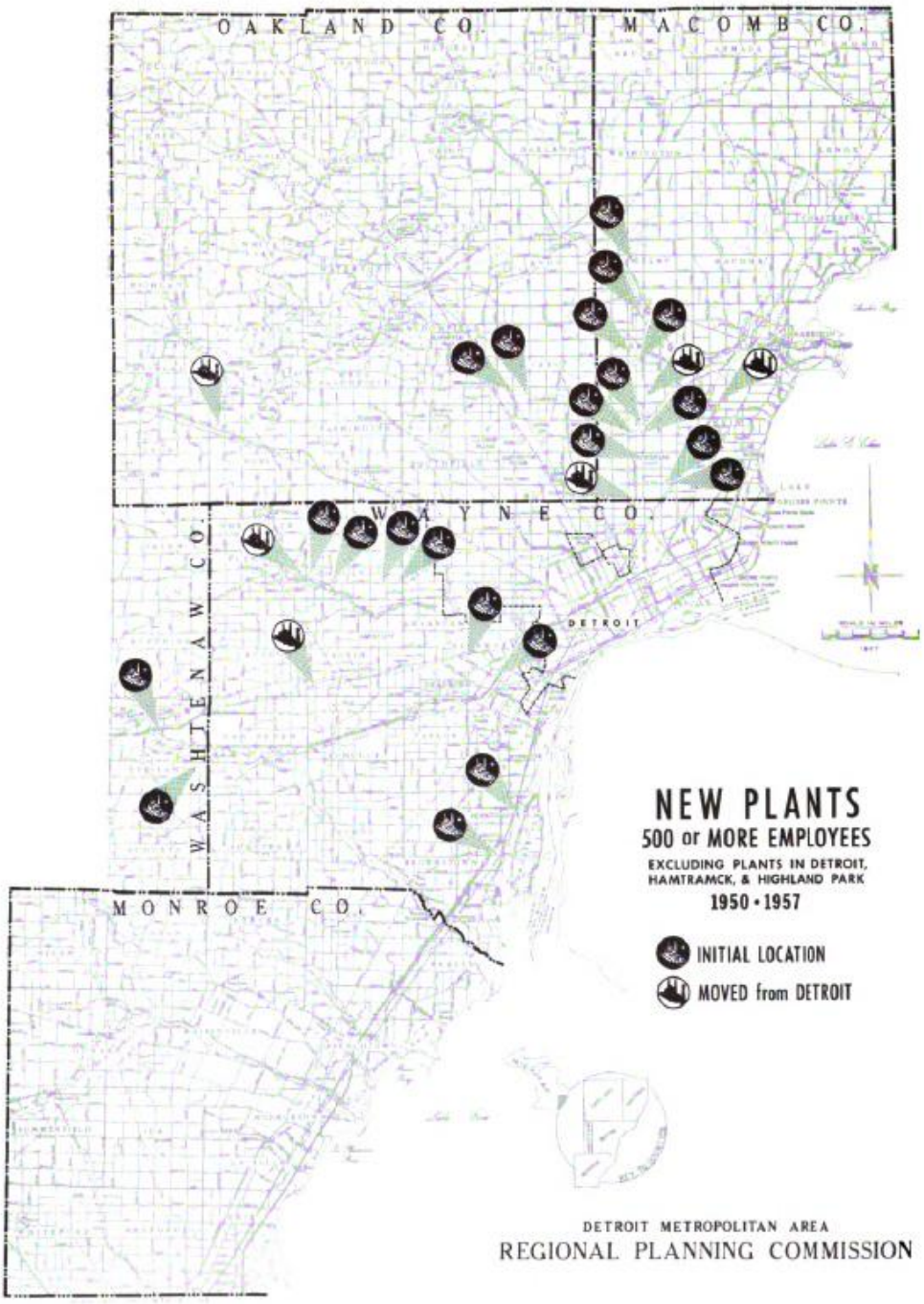

Figure 1.12. Suburbanization of Detroit industry accelerated in the 1950s, particularly along the Van Dyke corridor in Macomb County and the Schoolcraft-Plymouth corridor in western Wayne County. This Regional Planning Commission map shows new suburban manufacturing plants with more than 500 employees that opened between 1950 and 1957. Plants outlined in white relocated from Detroit. Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Manufacturing Growth in the Detroit Region, 1950-1956," April 1958, 19.

acre facility on Detroit's East Side in 1956. Hudson's two Detroit plants closed after it was absorbed into George Romney's American Motors between 1954 and 1957.[106] Building permits issued for factories and shops in Detroit declined almost every year over the Fifties.[107] Between 1953 and 1960, Detroit's East Side alone lost over 70,000 manufacturing jobs,[108] about the same number that the suburbs had gained in the Big Three's spate of suburban plant construction from 1947 to 1955.[109]

Detroit might still be synonymous with American industry, but the balance of industrial employment in the region was shifting to the suburbs. The Regional Planning Commission's data revealed the extraordinary pace of the migration. In 1950, Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park still contained more than twice as many manufacturing jobs as the suburbs. Six years later, the suburbs had gained nearly 100,000 jobs and the city had lost nearly 100,000, suggesting the advent of a suburban majority in manufacturing by the end of the decade.[110] Macomb County more than doubled its total industrial employment over the same six-year period.[111] By 1956, more than 40,000 people worked manufacturing jobs in the city of Warren alone, which had consisted of little more than farmers' fields just fifteen years earlier.[112]

The Regional Planning Commission's 1953 plan might not have carried formal authority. Yet there could be little doubt that the vision for a decentralized region was coming to fruition, thanks in large part to the region's highway builders and the automakers whose plant decisions drove so much of the region's economic life. The broad elite consensus behind the desirability of suburbanization, however—the "dictatorship of a good idea" that made Blakeman's regional plan something more than an exercise in wishful thinking—did not necessarily extend to every detail of postwar metropolitan development. This was particularly true where the management of regional assets was up for grabs. In the midst of two such struggles in the 1950s—battles between Detroit and Wayne County over airports and water infrastructure—Edward Connor saw an opportunity to build a new metropolitan political structure that complemented the Regional

[106] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 136.
[107] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 150.
[108] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 149.
[109] Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, 72.
[110] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Manufacturing Growth in the Detroit Region, 1950-1956," April 1958, 2.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, "Manufacturing Growth in the Detroit Region, 1950-1956," April 1958, 11.

Planning Commission's planning efforts, a project that also promised to help the ambitious councilman leverage the suburbs' growing political might and, perhaps, get out of Mayor Cobo's shadow.

Connor's Inter-Governmental Gambit

When the Regional Planning Commission released its 1953 regional plan, Edward Connor's term as Chairman was over, but Connor still served on the organization's Executive Committee. He had served on that body continuously since the RPC's creation, one of only four members to do so. The other three men were the leading directors of regional infrastructure: Detroit City Engineer George R. Thompson, Detroit Board of Water Commissioners Superintendent Laurence G. Lenhardt, and Wayne County Highway Engineer Leroy C. Smith. Connor was the only elected official of the four, and in fact, he seems to have been the only elected official among the RPC's 46 members. Indeed, he served not as one of the RPC's 23 public officials, but as one of the 23 "representatives of civic, economic, and social fields," as director of Future Detroit, Inc., the latest incarnation of the Citizens Housing and Planning Commission.[113]

By 1954, any hopes Connor entertained of breaking Cobo's hold on city government had been extinguished. In 1953, Cobo was reelected Mayor for a third time with sixty percent of the vote, the same total he had received in 1949 and 1951, defeating Democrat James Lincoln.[114] Connor continued to do battle with Cobo over a range of issues in city government, including downtown parking garage construction,[115] but he saw more opportunities to build his political influence beyond the city limits by making common cause against Cobo in concert with suburban officials.

The struggle over a new metropolitan airport presented one such opportunity. By the time the Regional Planning Commission released its plan, a debate over the location of a new

[113] "RPC 1953 Annual Report," Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, 18. The CHPC changed its name to Future Detroit, Inc. in 1950, and "became inactive" in 1953, the year of Cobo's re-election as Mayor, before finally shutting down for good in 1954, the year Connor launched the Supervisors Inter-County Committee. See Edward Connor Collection finding aid, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, https://reuther.wayne.edu/files/UP000242.pdf, accessed June 10, 2020, 4.
[114] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 646. Detroit shifted from two-year to four-year terms for its elected officials in 1953. "Here Are the Facts Voters Need," *Detroit Free Press*, Novemeber 1, 1953, C-2.
[115] "Cobo Attempts to Check Connor," *Detroit Free Press*, May 24, 1954, 13.

airport—or airports—in the region had been underway for nearly a decade. Detroit's old City Airport, a small pre-war field on the east side of the city, could only accommodate two-engine aircraft, and the adjacent neighborhoods made expansion unlikely.[116] City Airport did not even show up on the RPC's map, which suggested the area would be given over to industrial development. The RPC did identify three other, already existing airports: Selfridge Air Force Base on Lake St. Clair in Macomb County; Willow Run, which had temporarily become the region's major commercial air facility after the war;[117] and Wayne County Airport, twelve miles towards Detroit along the Willow Run Expressway.

Conspicuously absent in the RPC plan was a fourth major airport, somewhere in Oakland or Macomb County. This airport did not exist in 1953, but it had been the subject of extensive public discussion. Members of the Detroit Board of Commerce believed the Willow Run and Wayne County sites were too distant from the city center, and that the region's major airport should be located more in line with the anticipated growth of the region towards the north and northwest. The Board of Commerce even went so far as to offer to purchase 704 acres in Oakland County, just north of the Eight Mile Road boundary, and donate it to the city as a portion of the new airport.[118]

That site failed to win support, however. By 1952 the Board of Commerce and Mayor Cobo were advocating a site in northeastern Warren Township which could complement one of the two existing western airports. Warren Township was developing rapidly, however—with more than 40,000 residents in 1950, it was the largest township in Michigan—and the proposal spurred immediate protests from local residents and their elected officials, who cited the effects of noise, declining property values, and the loss of taxable land.[119]

The people of Warren Township found a formidable ally in Wayne County Highway Engineer Leroy Smith. Like Robert Moses of New York, Smith held no elected position, but

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[116] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 295.
[117] The City of Detroit and Wayne County had declined to purchase Willow Run Airport after the war when the federal government put it up for sale. Instead, it was purchased by the University of Michigan (for one dollar), with the intention of using its facilities to complement the School of Engineering. Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 312-313.
[118] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis,* 301. The site offered by the Board of Commerce was located at Eight Mile and Wyoming, just north of the small black enclave on the Detroit side of Eight Mile. As Thomas Sugrue notes, the limited political power of the adjacent residents was undoubtedly a selling point of the site to city officials (and presumably the Board of Commerce), who expected their resistance to be weaker than that in wealthier, all-white areas. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 68.
[119] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis,* 336-8.

since taking office in 1918, he had turned his mastery of public road dollars into almost unrivaled political power. Unlike Moses, Smith did not seek the political spotlight, but by the 1950s he controlled a semi-autonomous public works empire with an annual budget of $65 million, or nearly $600 million in 2020 dollars. His influence extended far beyond Wayne County through his relationships with other county road commissions across the state. "[S]tate capital veterans," the *Detroit Times* reported, "declare [Smith] can get more out of the legislature in a five-minute telephone conversation than experienced lobbyists can win in five weeks of wining and dining."[120]

Since 1944, Smith had been set on making his own County Airport the region's primary air facility.[121] Although the airport was located twenty miles distant from downtown Detroit in southwest Wayne County's Romulus Township, this ultimately worked in its favor: unlike the Oakland and Macomb County sites under consideration, the area around the County field was largely unpopulated, ensuring that there would be little local opposition to its expansion. As the Board of Commerce, city and suburbs debated the merits of other sites, Smith used millions of dollars in state, local and federal funds to build a new airport adjacent to the old one.[122] He also used his clout in Lansing to help the Macomb County leaders pass legislation to block the City from pursuing the Warren Township site by requiring approval from the County Board of Supervisors. The Board of Commerce attempted to mediate by calling a meeting between the County Road Commission and the City's Aviation Commission. This was a failure; "its tenor," one observer commented, "is indicated by the use of the word 'liar' in some of the less heated verbal exchanges."[123]

For Connor, the airport battle presented an opportunity to take on the Mayor in concert with allies in the suburbs and County government. He urged his colleagues on Council to join him in supporting the Legislature's proposal "as a matter of good relations and common sense with other units of government."[124] In 1954, Connor established a new base of operations—outside the straitjacket of City government—by securing the position of chairman of the Wayne County Board of Supervisors.

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[120] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis,* 297-8.
[121] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 298.
[122] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 331. According to one of his rivals, Smith had allowed the Michigan Aeronautics Commission to believe that the federal funds were being used simply for the expansion of the old facility. Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 329.
[123] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 344.
[124] "Anti-Airport Bill Backed in Council," *Detroit Free Press,* February 10, 1953, 3.

As a power position, the chairmanship was not equal to the mayor's seat. The Board of Supervisors was an unwieldy 111-member body composed of representatives from every township and city in the County, partially weighted by population. By tradition, the chairmanship rotated between a member of Detroit Common Council and an "out-county" official from the County's suburbs or rural townships.[125] The Board's authority was limited by the convoluted structure of county government established by Michigan law. Containing dozens of other independently elected officials, and powerful semi-autonomous agencies like the Road Commission, it formed "a nightmare to one with a passion for clear-cut lines of authority and responsibility."[126] Nonetheless, seeking to make political capital of the region's suburbanization, Connor set about turning his position as Chairman into the center of a multi-county sphere of influence.

Soon after assuming his new role, Connor extended a lunch invitation to the chair of the Oakland County Board of Supervisors, Floyd Andrews. Andrews was a 19-year veteran of that position, which he held by virtue of his post as supervisor of rural Independence Township and postmaster for the village of Clarkston.[127] He had never before met with any Wayne County official, and he doubted Connor's motives enough that he brought along his attorney to the meeting. After some discussion, Connor recounted, "they decided that I wasn't up to anything much and they decided to go along with it and said let's have lunch again."[128] Connor and Andrews went on to invite the Macomb County chairman to lunch, and eventually the chairs of neighboring Washtenaw and Monroe County. On June 25, 1954, the group adopted a resolution of intent to hold "joint meetings to discuss problems of mutual interest and concern." In August, they met for the first time as the Supervisors Inter-County Committee or SICC. If Connor's account can be believed, he initially declined the nomination to chair the group, but relented at the insistence of his colleagues. "Go ahead, Connor," said one. "We have the votes to outvote you anyhow."[129]

Having previously chaired the Regional Planning Commission—and lobbied for its creation—Connor seems to have concluded that the region needed a different sort of

[125] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis,* 178, 646.
[126] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis,* 179.
[127] "Past Supervisor Taken by Death," *The Clarkston News,* October 20, 1960, 1.
[128] Edward Connor, speech at Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association Annual Dinner, January 17, 1963, in ECP, Box 24, Pittsburgh RPA Conference, 7.
[129] Edward Connor, speech at Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association Annual Dinner, January 17, 1963, in ECP, Box 24, Pittsburgh RPA Conference, 9.

metropolitan organization, more attuned to politics than planning. By the close of 1953, in fact, the year the RPC plan had hailed as a "milestone of unprecedented significance," the RPC's Development Area Councils were "either moribund or floundering badly," according to one assessment. The RPC had enjoyed some success in stimulating the formation of suburban municipal planning commissions, but director Blakeman's pessimism on the prospects for regional thinking had been amply borne out.[130]A 1956 SICC publicity brochure suggests Connor's thinking on the two agencies' respective roles. Breezily asserting that the RPC and SICC "are not at all in conflict, nor do they duplicate each other's efforts," it explained that the former was a "planning body…with no power to take action," whereas the SICC was an "*action* group."[131]

Connor also had his own political career in mind. The SICC's county-based structure conveniently excluded Mayor Cobo and his lieutenants in Detroit city government, who were heavily represented on the board of the Regional Planning Commission.[132] By contrast, Connor was in a position to dominate the SICC. SICC's founding documents stressed that the organization was formed for the purpose of "representing the six counties equally," but Wayne County had more than twice the population of the other five put together, allowing Connor to play the leading role.[133] Connor was mulling his own bid for Mayor in the 1957 election, and the SICC was the kind of project that would help to build his public profile.[134]

Soon after the formation of the SICC, Connor attempted to play the role of regional statesman in another rancorous city-county fight, this one over water. The postwar tide of development placed new strains on Detroit's water system, to the point that the Water Department began to restrict the watering of lawns.[135] The City had supplied water to suburban areas for decades, and in 1951 it broke ground on a new northeastern pumping station on Eight Mile Road, intended to serve the burgeoning suburbs beyond.[136] However, in a 1954 letter to the Common Council, Water Department Manager Lawrence Lenhardt stated that after the

[130] Thomas, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 33.
[131] P. Earl Stephens, *This is the Supervisors Inter-County Committee: how six Michigan counties are solving common problems* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Edison Company, 1956), in SEMCOG Papers, Box 94, Folder 16.
[132] "1953 Annual Report," Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, in Edward Connor Papers, Box 20, "Reports."
[133] Thomas, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 149. St. Clair County, north of Macomb, joined SICC as its sixth county in 1955. Thomas, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 84.
[134] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis,* 202-3.
[135] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis,* 171.
[136] Norman Kenyon, "Water, Water, Everywhere," *Detroit Free Press,* December 13, 1953, B1.

completion of the northeastern station and another northwest facility, the city should cease its expansion program. Wayne County, he wrote, ought to be responsible for supplying suburban areas west and south of Dearborn.[137]

The Wayne County Road Commission stood ready to step into the breach. The enterprising Leroy Smith had added suburban water lines to his infrastructure portfolio during the war. As of yet, however, these were merely an extension of the Detroit system, requiring Smith to do battle with Lenhardt to seek more water for the Wayne County suburbs.[138] In 1955, the crisis reached a point where a moratorium on new housing construction was issued in several suburban Wayne County townships.[139] Smith was more than happy to take Lenhardt's advice and prepare a proposal for a Wayne County intake and filtration plant, to be located in the Downriver suburb of Allen Park.[140] Yet when Lenhardt retired, Mayor Cobo appointed a successor, Gerald Remus, who opposed the development of a County system and argued the Detroit Water Department should continue to manage the expansion of a single metropolitan water system.[141]

In 1956, the SICC waded into the suburban water issue by commissioning a study on the question. The report ultimately sided with the City of Detroit in recommending a single metropolitan system under City control.[142] Nonetheless, Connor and several other Common Council members continued to vote in favor of allowing the County to proceed with its Allen Park plant, prompting charges that they were carrying water for Leroy Smith.[143] The city-county water war dragged on until 1959, when the SICC helped persuade Detroit Common Council to accept Wayne County representation on the Detroit Board of Water Commissioners in exchange for the City's takeover of the County system.[144] By that time, Cobo was dead and Smith had retired after nearly four decades at the helm of the County Road Commission.[145] The City may have prevailed in the water fight, but Smith had won the airport battle. Although discussion of a second, northern airport continued for years afterwards, in 1958 the Detroit Aviation Commission belatedly recognized the county site, whose first modern terminal opened that year, as the city's major commercial airport.

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[137] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 173-5.
[138] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 184.
[139] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 184.
[140] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 189.
[141] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 190-1.
[142] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 210.
[143] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 217.
[144] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 226; Thomas, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 561.
[145] Mowitz and Wright, *Profile of a Metropolis*, 210;

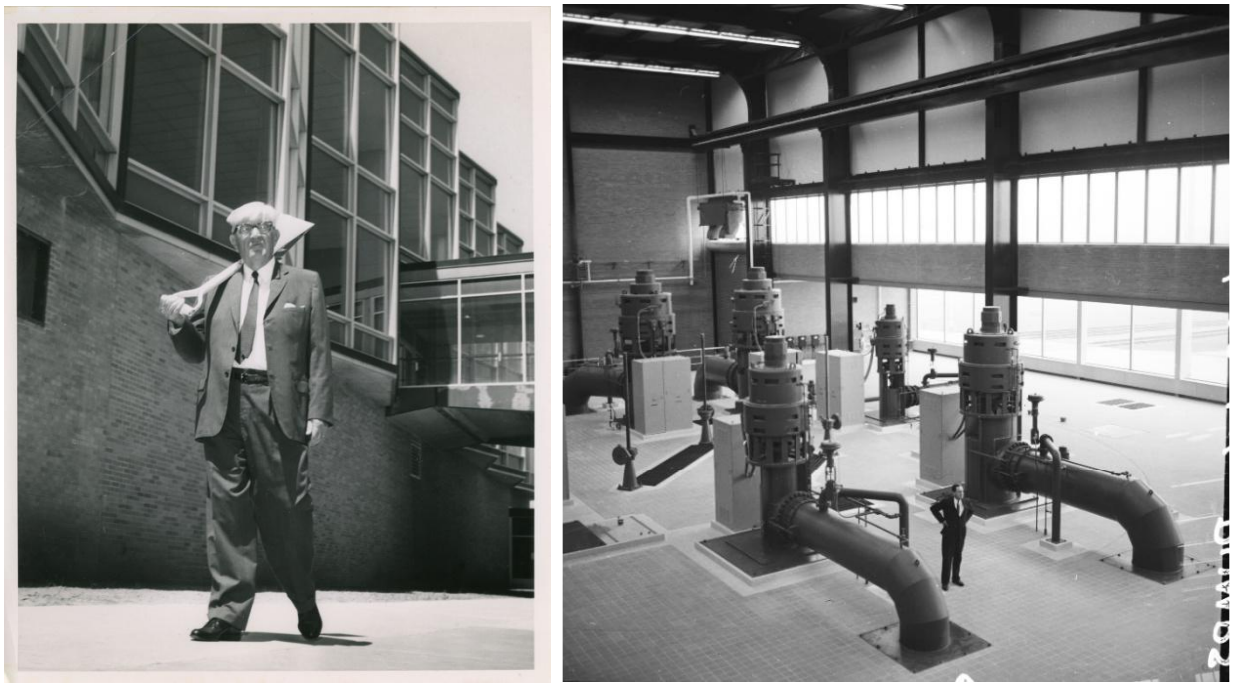

Figure 1.13a and 1.13b. Airports and water infrastructure were major fronts of City-County contention in the 1950s. Left: Wayne County Highway Engineer Leroy Smith in 1958, standing victorious in front of the new terminal of the Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport. Right: Interior of the completed Allen Park pumping station, focal point in the Detroit-Wayne County water war of 1955-59. The man in foreground may be City Water Department director Gerald Remus. Detroit-Wayne County Metropolitan Airport, "The History of Detroit Metro Airport," and Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

In his dual role as Detroit councilman and progenitor of the SICC, Connor had helped set an important precedent in regional governance: institutionalizing suburban participation in managing metropolitan infrastructure. The political dividends, however, were less than he might have anticipated. Connor ultimately decided not to run for Mayor. His efforts to pass county home rule legislation—which would have allowed him to seek the new position of Wayne County Executive—met opposition from Mayor Louis Miriani, who succeeded Cobo after he died in office in 1957.[146] In 1960, Connor sought the Democratic nomination for Governor, and lost.[147]

Connor's metropolitan organization-building did pay off in other respects. By the mid-1950s, discussion of "metropolitan area problems" was a popular pastime for public officials,

[146] Thomas, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 506-8. A 1967 *Detroit Free Press* editorial referred to the County Executive position as Connor's "secret dream." If so, it was one of the worst-kept secrets in Michigan politics. "Mr. Wayne County," *Detroit Free Press*, February 21, 1967, 6A.
[147] Thomas, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 506-8.

academicians and philanthropists. Michigan State University hosted a national conference on the subject in 1956.[148] The following year, Connor pitched a proposal to the Ford Foundation for a five-year, five-million-dollar grant to establish a non-profit Southeastern Michigan Metropolitan Community Research Corporation that would complement the activities of the SICC and the Regional Planning Commission.[149] The foundation approved a scaled-down grant of $900,000 over four years,[150] and Connor added a new title to his already extensive list of roles. Yielding the chairmanship of SICC to his Oakland County counterpart, Connor continued to serve on the Detroit Common Council, and accepted the position of Secretary of the new organization, for which he received a respectable second salary of $12,000 per year.[151]

By the close of the Fifties, there could be little doubt that the future landscape of metropolitan Detroit would look very different than the prewar city. As the centrifugal growth of the region continued, more of it would be metropolitan, and less of it would be Detroit. The formation of metropolitan institutions acknowledged the shift towards the suburbs, and the fact that the central city was no longer the region's only major political actor. For the most part, these metropolitan institutions, like the Regional Planning Commission, saw their role as helping to facilitate that shift. *Fortune* editor William H. Whyte might describe "urban sprawl" as the result of too little planning, the lack of a "pattern of growth,"[152] but the fact was that sprawl was planned, and had been for decades. It had been planned for by Mayor Couzens and Sidney Waldon's Rapid Transit Commission, by the Inter-County Superhighway Commissions, and eventually by the Regional Planning Commission itself.

Pioneering though they were, however, Detroit's new metropolitan institutions were fragile things. The Regional Planning Commission's "dictatorship of a good idea" only ruled so long as everyone agreed. While the region's leading citizens accepted the desirability and inevitability of suburbanization, the Commission had no authority to resolve disputes over the

[148] Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 279.
[149] Southeast Michigan Metropolitan Community Research Corporation, "A Proposal-Request to the Ford Foundation," August 26, 1957, in SEMCOG Papers, Part II, Box 27, Folder 6. This sum amounts to $41 million in 2020 dollars.
[150] Thomas, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 551.
[151] Southeast Michigan Metropolitan Community Research Corporation, "Attachment to IRS Form 1023," April 4, 1960, SEMCOG Papers, Part II, Box 17, Folder 31.
[152] William H. Whyte, Jr., "Urban Sprawl," in *The Exploding Metropolis* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, 1958), 134.

specific terms of that process. When conflicts emerged, as they did over airports and water, they were settled in the political arena, not by the Regional Planning Commission or its draftsmen.

Edward Connor recognized that reality. The Supervisors Inter-County Committee was both a vehicle for his own political aspirations and a step towards greater political influence for the growing suburbs, particularly those of Oakland and Macomb County, which had neither a single large city government like Detroit's or a powerful county bureaucracy like Leroy Smith's Wayne County empire. Nonetheless, the SICC too was a voluntary body, without any ability to compel action from its members, not a regional government unto itself. In the fight over water, it could only attempt to intervene from the sidelines as the two heavies, the City and the County, fought their way to a draw. The SICC was also exceptionally dependent on the person of Connor himself. An observer noted that Connor "constantly refers to SICC as 'his' organization," and Connor installed his confidante Gerard Coleman, a former merchandising representative, as the group's Executive Director. As one business leader commented in a revealing analogy, SICC's success relied heavily—perhaps almost totally—on Connor and Coleman's mastery of behind-the-scenes politics.

> The political environment surrounding SICC reminds me of an Ohio State football game. Ohio usually starts at one end of the field and eventually scores by using straight ahead and slight slant plunges which yield only five or so yards at a time. Many fans roar approval while others sit back in awe at the overt display of raw power. What is not overtly evident is the marvelous cross-blocking and trap play executions on the part of the Ohio line. This analogy holds true for SICC. Overtly, the political leaders appear to move into substantive program areas with great ease. However, SICC has been extremely successful in gaining public and private support for these programs in advance. This success can be traced directly to Coleman's fine execution of personal persuasion and political salesmanship techniques. He, with Ed. Connor's assistance, has developed a well cultivated ability to deal with community leaders, and to translate programs into visible political realities capable of generating positive spill-over effects significant to local politics and position…SICC's style is a tribute to Connor's political ability and to Coleman's follow-through.[153]

The SICC was ultimately perhaps less a genuine governance body than a "soft-sell merchandising organ capable of uniting the Region's public and private power structures."[154] Yet as with the Regional Planning Commission, a "soft sell" approach would not suffice when the region's leaders found themselves on opposing teams.

[153] Thomas, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 151.
[154] Thomas, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 149.

The limitations of metropolitan planning and governance in Detroit did not prevent Connor from taking some pride in the metropolitan institutions he had helped to build in the age of the exploding metropolis. "Working together in the past 10 or 15 years," he announced in a 1961 speech to the SICC, "we have created in this area a situation that is unique in the country, and I think unique in the world. We have attempted to develop instruments and tools that we can use to influence the future. There are three such tools," he explained—the Regional Planning Commission; the Supervisors Inter-County Committee, and the Southeast Michigan Metropolitan Community Research Corporation—"and, to my knowledge, no area in the country has all three of them." Together, they made the region a "three-car family," and in the coming decade, as the region's urbanized area expanded by another 300 square miles, they would ensure the region avoided the land use errors of the past. "With these three cars," Connor concluded, "our family can look with confidence to the road that all of us will have to travel in the next ten years," even "serve as an example to the entire country."[155]

Over the next several years, however, the road ahead took turns that Connor may not have anticipated, due in part to aspects of metropolitan growth that Connor did not mention: the fact that suburbanization of population was disproportionately a movement of the middle and upper classes, and almost exclusively a whites-only phenomenon. As the costs of suburbanization to the city of Detroit became more apparent, and white flight helped open a path to regime change in City Hall, the torch of metropolitan reform passed to a new set of actors. With the encouragement of the federal government, and the generous assistance of the Ford Foundation, they would begin to retool the "three cars" for the age of President Kennedy's New Frontier and Johnson's Great Society, an age whose most optimistic anthems came straight out of Motown.

[155] "Remarks of Edward Connor Before the Supervisors Inter-County Committee," April 26, 1961, in ECP, Box 50.

Chapter 2: Brave New COG

In 1963, an Oregon city manager named Kent Mathewson traveled to Detroit for a luncheon interview with the five most powerful men in Michigan. The meeting took place over lunch in the Detroit Club, an exclusive institution whose red-brick, Gilded Age–era building hunched in the shadows of downtown Detroit's skyscrapers. The welcoming committee for Mathewson included Henry Ford II, chairman of Ford Motor Company; Chrysler chairman Lynn Townsend; General Motors president Jack Gordon; Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanagh; and Michigan Governor George Romney, former president of the American Motors Corporation. They wanted to recruit Mathewson to chair an organization called the Metropolitan Fund, intended to modernize regional governance in greater Detroit.

Mathewson was then the city manager of Salem, Oregon, population 50,000. He was accustomed to meeting with various dignitaries, but later confessed to feeling "slightly intimidated." Finally, he turned to General Motors president Gordon and asked, in the Southern accent he had retained from his adolescent years in North Carolina, "what it was I would be expected to do if I took the job."

"Why," Gordon said, "we simply want you to solve our metropolitan problem."

In his memoirs, Mathewson did not record his response to this statement, but he took the job.[1]

The Metropolitan Frontier

The men who summoned Mathewson to Detroit were in many respects the inheritors of Edward Connor's handiwork over the previous two decades. The Metropolitan Fund was in fact the reincarnation of the Southeast Michigan Metropolitan Community Research Corporation, the

[1] Lynn W. Hall, *Kent Mathewson: Keeper of the Flame* (self-published, 2001), 120-122. Karl Gregory recalled Mathewson's accent in an interview nearly 50 years after meeting Mathewson in 1967. Tobi Voigt, oral history interview with Dr. Karl Gregory, September 1, 2015, Detroit Historical Society, https://detroit1967.detroithistorical.org/items/show/249, accessed August 6, 2020.

third of the "three cars" that Connor, in various capacities, had helped to create. It was also the beneficiary of growing nationwide interest in the problems of the "exploding metropolis," and the possibility of new metropolitan institutions that could address them.

In 1957, the American Academy of Political and Social Science published a special issue of its *Annals* titled "Metropolis in Ferment," culminating in a remarkable essay by one of the volume's editors, Paul N. Ylvisaker. Several articles in the issue took a dim view of the metropolitan fermentation. Sociologist David Riesman, describing "The Suburban Dislocation," lamented the march of highways—which, he wrote, "takes on the lunatic quality of an arms race"—and what he termed the "aimless quality of suburban life…a pervasive low-keyed unpleasure."[2] Frank Zeidler, the Socialist mayor of Milwaukee, predicted a bleak future for the cities. Even if they survived the looming threat of nuclear war, they might still be doomed by hostile state legislatures and white racism towards incoming black migrants. The concentration of these newcomers in central cities, he warned, might well generate "a segregated caste system…as the northern whites seek to withdraw from contact with the Negro community," and bring "a greater tendency in the North to follow the pattern of the southern states."[3]

By contrast, Ylvisaker's essay—"Innovation and Evolution: Bridge to the Future Metropolis"—expressed confidence that American ingenuity would develop workable solutions to metropolitan problems. Written from the perspective of a historian in the year 1980, his essay described how enterprising reformers of the 1960s and beyond had steered a middle course between "blind action" and laissez-faire "urban conservatism," thanks to "the same unlikely coalition of pragmatist and idealist, politician and intellectual with which history generally allies itself during critical periods." Ylvisaker conceded that the metropolis had real problems, but they could be overcome:

> Crisis—the usual device by which history introduces a new era—was one factor in producing the coalition, but it was not the dramatic sort which alarmists of the 1950's had predicted. There were no massive transportation failures, no uncontrollable waves of race or juvenile violence, no total bankruptcies of central city—technically and politically, Americans were too resourceful to let such obvious problems become that bad.[4]

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[2] David Riesman, "The Suburban Dislocation," in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 314 (1957), 123-146.
[3] Frank P. Zeidler, "Urbanism and Government, 1957-1977," *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 314 (1957), 74-81.
[4] Paul N. Ylvisaker, "Innovation and Evolution: Bridge to the Future Metropolis," *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 314 (1957), 156-164.

The key to Ylvisaker's reform scheme was the creation of new metropolitan governments—complete with "metromayors"—which would preserve a degree of local control while re-incorporating central cities and suburbs into meaningful wholes.[5] The traditional argument for metropolitan government on the basis of efficiency lacked "political sex appeal," he wrote, and proved inconsistent in practice. Instead, the metropolitan coalition could succeed only by appealing to the historical precedent of the U.S. Constitution's framework for a "more perfect union." Metropolitan government would come into being "in the image of American federalism."[6]

Ylvisaker's ideas were not unique. In the same volume, Luther Gulick of the Institute of Public Administration in New York City described such a "metropolitan council" as the optimal solution to the emerging metropolitan community. What did distinguish Ylvisaker was his unique ability to compel such a vision into being, using the resources of the world's largest foundation. The son of the president of a Lutheran college in rural Minnesota, Ylvisaker had received a doctorate in political science from Harvard with a dissertation examining the political consensus-building that had modernized county government in his home state during the New Deal era.[7] After a stint as a professor at Swarthmore College, outside Philadelphia, Ylvisaker sought practical experience in government as an aide to the city's reform mayor (later Senator) Joseph Clark. In 1955, he joined the staff of the Ford Foundation in New York as director of its Public Affairs Program, a division that was soon funding metropolitan area projects around the country.[8]

It was to Ylvisaker that Edward Connor, in 1957, pitched his proposal for the Southeastern Michigan Metropolitan Community Research Corporation.[9] A collaboration between members of the SICC and representatives of the area's major universities, the Corporation would be a vehicle for "research, planning and intelligent community action," ensuring a "more effective approach to the meeting of those problems being produced by the

[5] Paul Ylvisaker, "Innovation and Evolution: Bridge to the Future Metropolis," *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 314 (1957), 156-164.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Karen Ferguson, *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 52.
[8] Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities*, 283-4.
[9] Southeast Michigan Metropolitan Community Research Corporation, "A Proposal-Request to the Ford Foundation," August 26, 1957, in SEMCOG Papers, Part II, Box 27, Folder 6. This sum amounts to $41 million in 2020 dollars.

inevitable expansion and complexity of the New Metropolitan Community—a living social organism which is no longer a thing of the future—it is here today and will be the future." The Detroit area, the proposal noted, "is known world-wide as typical of America—industrially and socially…Thus it will have acceptance as a representative or demonstration center for research, planning and guiding of community growth."[10]

As described in the proposal, the "problems" produced by the region's "inevitable" expansion were essentially technical ones.

> For example, a township in serving a new development puts in a six inch water line—the development expands and the water supply is not adequate—another small line is installed—and before long the two lines are inadequate.

"The desire to cooperate exists today in each governmental unit," the proposal asserted, "and this attitude is growing as the existence of the Metropolitan Community becomes clear to each public official and to each citizen." What was needed were "facts, figures and trends which will enable existing governmental units to function more effectively," and "on which basic 'grass-roots' understanding can be reached between the citizens and their governmental units."[11]

Connor well knew that metropolitan planning also posed political questions whose scope extended well beyond the appropriate diameter of suburban water lines. However, under executive director Walter Blucher, a former Detroit city planner who had served 19 years as head of the American Society of Planning Officials, the Corporation oriented itself primarily towards research, to the frustration of some regional leaders. "It was a big overstuffed think organization that never did anything," remarked one.[12] In the words of a later report to the Ford Foundation:

> Consensus could not be reached as to the proposed program of research. The hoped for cooperation between the university committee and governmental officials did not materialize. Public involvement in the program was far less than anticipated. Leadership elements of the community did not participate to the extent expected…
>
> …[M]ost significant of all, it also became apparent that the products of the Corporation's research were not being given careful consideration and its

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Thomas, Nicholas Patrick, "The Roundtables of Metroplex: A Comparison of the Supervisors Inter-County Committee (Detroit), the Metropolitan Regional Council (New York), and the Metropolitan Washington (D.C.) Council of Governments" (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 1968), 553.

> recommendations were not being implemented by the decision-makers within the region.[13]

Under pressure from the board, Blucher resigned in 1962, at the end of the 5-year grant period.[14] By 1963, however, some of the Corporation's trustees had decided to revive the organization as the Metropolitan Fund.

It seemed apparent that the region's experiments in metropolitan planning and governance had a promising future under the new liberal administration s in the White House and Detroit's City Hall. The political mood of the nation had changed under President Kennedy's New Frontier, and the federal government was taking new steps to mandate regional planning and governance. Kennedy had described the future of American cities as "the great unspoken, overlooked, underplayed problem of our time," and in a 1961 message to Congress, he argued for "an effective and comprehensive planning process in each metropolitan area," a process that recognized "[t]he city and its suburbs [as] interdependent parts of a single community."[15] Although the federal government had provided limited funding for regional planning agencies for some years, the 1962 Federal-Aid Highway Act was the first such piece of legislation to require a "continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative" process of regional transportation planning as a condition of receiving federal transportation funds. The legislation failed to specify exactly what that process should entail; nonetheless, it marked a departure from the Eisenhower era's laissez-faire posture towards metropolitan planning. Meanwhile, advocates like Paul Ylvisaker's former boss Joseph S. Clark—elected U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania in 1956—pressed for further aid to the cities, including funds for mass transit and the establishment of a federal department of urban affairs.[16] Metropolitan issues were sufficiently in vogue in liberal circles that the *Port Huron Statement*, the 1962 manifesto of the Students for a Democratic Society, devoted a section to "national and regional" solutions to the crisis of the cities. Echoing Ylvisaker's brief for a metropolitan federalism, author and Royal Oak native Tom Hayden called for countering "suburban escapism" by complementing "decentralized 'units' spread horizontally

[13] Metropolitan Fund, Inc., "Proposals for Extending the Relationship Between the Ford Foundation and Metropolitan Fund, Inc," Appendix A, in SEMCOG Papers, Part II, Box 27, Folder 3.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Roger Biles, *The Fate of Cities: Urban America and the Federal Government, 1945-2000* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 86; Robert Fishman, "The Death and Life of American Regional Planning," in Bruce Katz, ed., *Reflections on Regionalism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 107.
[16] Biles, *The Fate of Cities: Urban America and the Federal Government, 1945-2000* , 78, 98, 105-106.

with central, regional democratic control," ensuring "public, democratic control over the growth of the civic community and the allocation of resources."[17]

New faces in Detroit's City Hall also seemed to bode well for the future of metropolitan institutions, and the city's role within them. In 1961, Detroit's black community—which now represented nearly thirty percent of the population—mobilized to defeat incumbent Mayor Louis Miriani, who they held responsible for the Detroit Police Department's assaults on black citizens, and elect 33-year-old liberal Jerome Cavanagh. Whereas Cobo and Miriani had taken a largely hands-off attitude towards the burgeoning suburbs, Cavanagh made clear that he expected the suburbs to shoulder some of the responsibility for the city's ailing finances. Among the new mayor's first major battles was securing permission from the state legislature for a municipal income tax that would draw revenue from city residents and suburban commuters alike.[18] The system of electing Common Council members at large, rather than on a district basis, still functioned to diminish black representation on Detroit's city council. Bill Patrick, Jr., first elected to the previously all-white body in 1957, remained the Council's sole black member.[19] However, with the 1961election of Mel Ravitz, Detroit's legislative body gained a committed liberal and a shrewd analyst of the urban and metropolitan scene.

A scion of Detroit's upwardly mobile Jewish middle class, Ravitz was raised in the city's Dexter-Linwood area, the son of a headgear manufacturer who owned a factory downtown. Like many of his peers, he obtained a bachelor's degree from Wayne State University. Afterwards, he moved to New York and took a master's degree in sociology at the New School for Social Research, before returning to Detroit and completing a doctorate at the University of Michigan.[20] Ravitz described his father as a "Roosevelt Democrat," and for Ravitz, as for many of his peers, the New Deal defined not an outer limit but a point of departure for a more thoroughgoing reconstruction of American government and politics.[21]

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[17] Tom Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005 [1962]), 146. On the "practically maternal" relationship between the Students for a Democratic Society and its primary benefactor, the United Auto Workers, see Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997 [1995]), 391, and Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945-1968*, 158-160.

[18] Conot, *American Odyssey*, 449, 451.

[19] Young, *Hard Stuff*, 152.

[20] Berl Falbaum, "Council Maverick," *Detroit Jewish News*, November 23, 1984, 88.

[21] Ravitz noted that half of his close friends, a tight-knit group that had formed during their days at Detroit's Central High School, had voted Socialist in the 1948 presidential election; he did not record whether he himself was among them. Murray B. Seidler and Mel J. Ravitz, "A Jewish Peer Group," *American Journal of Sociology* 61.1 (1955), 13.

In superficial respects, at least, Ravitz epitomized the stereotypical mid-century academic. Known to some City Hall insiders as "The Professor," he was rarely seen without his pipe, and an adversary once complained that he "took three pages to say something that normally could be said in two words."[22] Yet the Professor also proved a force to be reckoned with outside the classroom. He was lecturing at Wayne State while completing his dissertation when he found that university policy barred him from full-time employment if he had not finished his degree in four years, leading him to take a position as a community organizer with the Detroit City Planning Commission. Ravitz's task in this role was to help stabilize a predominantly Italian-American area of Detroit's East Side that was quickly transitioning to black occupancy. Instead of "urban renewal" through wholesale demolition, the project marked an experiment in "neighborhood conservation," a task Ravitz approached through the formation of thirty-eight block clubs and collaborative enterprises like a neighborhood newspaper, alley clean-ups, and "street dances," as well as city-sponsored physical interventions like home repairs, targeted demolitions, pocket parks and traffic diversions.[23] Ravitz noted that although some of the area's white residents initially hoped the planners would help them to expel the black newcomers, neighborhood organizing began to break down inter-racial distrust: "concern with common problems came to the fore," and black and white residents even began sitting together at meetings. In the end, however, the conservation program was a victim of its own success. After neighborhood residents organized to demand better services from City Hall, Mayor Miriani responded by transferring Ravitz and his conservation colleagues to the Detroit Housing Commission, effectively killing the program and prompting Ravitz's resignation and Council run.[24]

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[22] Ladd Neuman, "New Ravitz Inspires Council to Move," *Detroit Free Press,* November 1, 1970, 3B; Remer Tyson, "Ravitz Asks Nichols to Quit," *Detroit Free Press*, July 20, 1973, 3A. "Let us just say," commented *Free Press* columnist Judd Arnett, "that if you were a stranger in town and standing in front of the Kern Block, and you wanted to get to Hudson's, which is about an eight-iron shot away, and you asked The Professor [Ravitz] for directions, he would give them to you in approximately 300 lucid and perfectly-formed words." Judd Arnett, "A Quality Council With Dr. Ravitz," *Detroit Free Press,* October 31, 1969, 12D. Not to be outdone, the *Detroit News* commented that "[o]ne can watch the birth, maturity and death of every syllable Mel Ravitz utters." "Council chief Ravitz says he's the most experienced," *Detroit News,* August 14, 1973, 4A.

[23] See Kenneth Roy Toole, *Analysis and Evaluation of the Mack-Concord Conservation Project, Detroit, Michigan* (M.U.P. thesis, Michigan State University, 1964). Ravitz's organizing efforts may have been aided by the fact that his wife Eleanor, formerly Eleanor Piazzon, was herself raised in Detroit Italian-American community. "50th anniversaries for 4 area couples," *Detroit News* ,January 3, 1972, 2-B.

[24] Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit*, 94-96.

After his election to Common Council, Ravitz continued to advocate for policies that would desegregate Detroit and help to stabilize racially changing neighborhoods—a particular concern to the city's Jewish community, for both altruistic and pragmatic reasons, since older Jewish neighborhoods, like Ravitz's native Dexter-Linwood area, continued to present the path of least resistance for black Detroiters who faced organized violence when seeking housing in other all-white areas at the fringe of the expanding ghetto.[25] Along with Bill Patrick, he sponsored a Fair Neighborhood Practices Ordinance that was ultimately passed by Council in November 1962 after amendments that narrowed its scope to targeting racial fearmongering by realtors. Patrick and Ravitz warned that in its weakened form, the ordinance failed to "focus attention on the basic problems inherent in the segregated housing pattern of Detroit."[26] Detroit's Commission on Community Relations only added to their concerns the following month when its director refused to act on complaints brought forward under the ordinance by Irving Rubin, the Michigan State Highway Department public relations maven, who had also spearheaded the formation of a non-segregationist neighborhood association in northwest Detroit's Bagley area.[27] The following year, little more than a month after Ravitz and his family returned from attending the 1963 March on Washington, Ravitz and Patrick's attempt to pass a stronger open occupancy ordinance was decisively rejected by the other seven members of Council—a group that included onetime housing advocate Edward Connor.[28] The effort came at a cost to the Ravitz family, for whom the issue of fair housing had become anything but academic. "We had our tires slashed and bricks thrown through our windshield on a regular basis," Ravitz's daughter Jill recalled some decades later.[29]

Despite the evident resistance of many white Detroiters to desegregation measures, Ravitz shared the hopes of Paul Ylvisaker and most liberal commentators with regard to the American metropolitan future. In a 1962 lecture entitled "The Sociology of the Suburbs," Ravitz Ravitz noted that while "Negroes" accounted for just 2.5% of the population of the suburbs in 1960, "[e]ventually and perhaps soon they are going to be racially desegregated." Furthermore,

[25] See Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), and Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 231-258.
[26] Berman, *Metropolitan Jews,* 127-130.
[27] Berman, Metropolitan Jews, 112-114. Pushing his rhetorical acumen to its limits, Rubin declared that his Bagley Community Council was neither "for integration" nor "against integration," but rather "for an open housing market all through the city." Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, 113.
[28] Stolberg, *Bridging the River of Hatred*, 185.
[29] Emma Jackson, "Recalling the movement," *The Ann Arbor News*, February 25, 2000, C2.

they would ultimately be re-incorporated with the central city in new structures of metropolitan governance:

> While it is unlikely that the suburbs will consent to annexation in the near future, it is likely that we will begin to see more and more inter-city and inter-county governmental structures established to handle the myriad problems of the region. We are on our way towards some form of metropolitan government. This is an inevitable next development in the growth of the urban area.
>
> Such metropolitan government, regardless of its specific form which will doubtless vary from community to community, is essential if we are to continue to have cities of any size at all. This metropolitan government will arise in response to the absolute needs of both the suburbs and the central city; it will result from the flow into the suburbs of those who have come to appreciate the problems of the city and from the return to the city of those who have experienced suburban living. This long range educational experience of living in both places will help achieve the political reality of metropolitan government to administer to what has even now become the social and economic reality of millions of people living a common and highly interdependent regional life.

"We may hope," Ravitz concluded, "that all and not just some will be able to enjoy this improved urban life."[30]

It was in this optimistic climate that the trustees of the Southeastern Michigan Metropolitan Community Research Corporation, now the Metropolitan Fund, prepared the organization for a fresh start. They adopted new bylaws, overhauled the membership of the board, and sought out a new executive director.[31] Kent Mathewson seemed to them an excellent fit.

Rise of a City Manager

The 45-year-old city manager recruited to lead the attack on Detroit's "metropolitan problem" had never lived in Michigan or managed a city of more than 50,000 people, let alone a

[30] Mel Ravitz, "The Sociology of the Suburbs," speech to Institute on Intergroup Relations, August 7, 1962, in MRP, Box 69, Folder 16.
[31] Metropolitan Fund, Inc., "Proposals for Extending the Relationship Between the Ford Foundation and Metropolitan Fund, Inc," Appendix A, in SEMCOG Papers, Part II, Box 27, Folder 3.

metropolitan area of several million. However, Kent Mathewson did have a family connection to Detroit, a promising record in the city manager business, and a generous share of ambition.

Mathewson's father, Park Mathewson, had been born into Detroit's turn-of-the-century upper class. He attended the private Grosse Pointe Academy outside Detroit and was active with the Republican Party. After the failure of a Central American venture with the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company, however, Mathewson left Detroit for New York.[32] There he joined a business consulting firm in the relatively new discipline of statistical analysis. Among his innovations was the "Bourse Business Barometer Dial," a monthly subscription service which attempted to summarize business conditions through a colored graphical chart.[33] Mathewson's work came to the attention of U.S. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, who in 1924 recommended Mathewson to a position as assistant director and statistician of the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development.[34] In 1930, when Kent was twelve years old, his father suffered an hemorrhage and died, at the age of 43, while attending the national convention of the Sons of the American Revolution.[35]

The younger Mathewson entered the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1935, intending to become a Presbyterian minister. But the professor who taught his first-year course on Municipal Government and Urban Affairs urged him to consider the new field of city management as an opportunity to serve a larger flock. After meeting with the new city managers of Durham, Greensboro and Charlotte, the nineteen-year-old Mathewson convinced UNC president Frank Porter Graham to create a new bachelor of science program in public administration, with a major in city management. [36]

In many respects, it was not surprising that Park Mathewson's son would take to the city manager profession. The city manager form of government had originated with turn-of-the-century businessmen who believed American cities should be governed after the model of the modern corporation, following principles of financial prudence and economy. Instead of handing public funds to an unruly group of elected officials, they sought to vest authority in a single appointed executive—ideally a businessman, or an expert trained in business principles. In the

[32] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame,* 23, 30.
[33] "Bourse Furnishes Monthly Business Barometer," *Office Appliances,* December 1921, 82.
[34] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame*, 23-24, 29.
[35] "Park Mathewson Dies at Convention," *New York Times*, June 6, 1930, 19.
[36] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame* , 8-9. Graham was a prominent Southern liberal and New Deal ally. See Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

words of historian James Weinstein, the new class of city managers likewise tended towards the belief that "elements of the community must be harmonized, but in the interest of the major stockholders."[37]

After graduating from UNC, Mathewson obtained a master's degree in public administration from Syracuse University's Maxwell School, the nation's oldest and most respected program in the discipline.[38] At the age of 29, he became the first professionally trained city manager of Asheboro, North Carolina. He set to work implementing modern management practices for the city in partnership with its elected officials, who included the owners of the city's major textile and furniture factories. Mathewson displayed considerable talent, both in his work and in the energy with which he advanced his own career. Within two years, he had been selected president of the North Carolina Association of City Managers, then recruited as the first city manager of nearby Martinsville, Virginia.[39]

Mathewson arrived in Martinsville in 1949, when the postwar civil rights movement was still a glimmer on the horizon. As the Jim Crow order came under growing assault, however, Mathewson's position as a racial moderate in a small Southern town grew increasingly precarious. The Supreme Court had handed down its *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954, and in December 1955, Rosa Parks inaugurated the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott. Mathewson was no radical, but he attempted to form a commission on race relations and asked the police chief to eliminate the Ku Klux Klan presence in the Martinsville police department.[40]

Such actions were more than enough to earn the family a reputation. Before long, Mathewson's teenage son was getting into fights with fellow students who called his father a "nigger-lover," and Mariana Mathewson urged her husband to move the family out of the South.[41] In 1956, he relented and accepted a new position as city manager of Salem, Oregon, three thousand miles and a world away from the upheavals in Dixie.

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[37] James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900-1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 112.
[38] Camilla Stivers, *Bureau Men, Settlement Women: Constructing Public Administration in the Progressive Era* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 119.
[39] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame*, 77-9.
[40] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame*, 94. In Mathewson's telling, his effort was successful, though it is difficult to know whether to accept this claim at face value.
[41] Interview with Bill Mathewson, Ann Arbor, MI, March 13, 2018.

"Massive Cooperation"

Mathewson had been in Salem only five months when he proposed the first stage of the metropolitan reforms that would eventually bring him to Detroit. Oregon's capital city sat on the banks of the Willamette River fifty miles south of Portland. One side of the river was Marion County; the other side was Polk County. To shape the region's development, Mathewson proposed a joint planning body with representation from the City of Salem, both counties, the local school district and the Oregon state government.[42] Most likely, Mathewson knew of the precedent set by Detroit's Supervisors Inter-County Committee and other groups of its kind, like the Metropolitan Regional Council just established in New York.[43]

Bringing the new organization into being was not a sure bet. Marion County had a growing population of more than 100,000. Polk County had little more than 25,000,[44] largely in farming communities, and they were wary of interference from their more urbanized neighbors. To win Polk's participation, Mathewson enlisted Oregon Governor Mark Hatfield in overtures to the county's elected leaders. At one meeting, held in the back room of a rural café, their discussions were interrupted by the birth of a litter of farm cats.[45]

Mathewson's legwork paid off. In 1958, he presided over the first meeting of an Inter-governmental Cooperation Study Committee, with representatives from all five governments. The effort eventually encompassed 17 subcommittees with more than two hundred members, including elected officials and such prominent businessmen as Gerald W. Frank, owner of Oregon's Meier and Frank department store chain. Mathewson described the effort as "massive cooperation," a hopeful counterpoint to the "massive resistance" to desegregation that was then sweeping the South.[46]

"Massive cooperation" was a timely concept in the late 1950s, since the prevailing trend in postwar American local government was towards massive fragmentation. As federal investment in highways and housing fueled suburban development beyond the old boundaries of central cities, many observers wrung their hands over the administrative chaos that ensued. At

[42] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame,* 103.
[43] Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 519.
[44] Forstall, Richard L., ed.,"Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990," United States Census Bureau, March 27, 1995.
[45] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame,* 106.
[46] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame,* 103.

the request of New York's Regional Plan Association, MIT researcher Robert Wood was hard at work on a study of local governance in greater New York that was published as *1400 Governments* in 1961.[47] In 1959, Congress created the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, tasked with research and recommendations on how state, federal and local governments might more effectively cooperate.[48] (Detroit's Edward Connor was a founding member.)[49]

In this climate, Mathewson's Salem experiment—among the first of its kind—drew national attention. The keynote speaker at the launch of Mathewson's Intergovernmental Cooperation Study Committee was Paul Ylvisaker. In an address delivered in the hulking New Deal edifice of the Oregon State Capitol, he hailed Mathewson and his collaborators as "early arrivals at the Constitutional Convention of the 20th century."[50] Ylvisaker probably sensed a kindred spirit in the Salem city manager: his own sort of pragmatic idealist. It was Ylvisaker who would recommend Mathewson to the most challenging assignment of his life, and subject his optimistic vision to a rigorous test.

Metropolitan Voluntarism

For the time being, Mathewson had more than enough to occupy him in Salem. The Mid-Willamette Valley Intergovernmental Cooperation Study Committee became the Mid-Willamette Valley Intergovernmental Cooperation Council, complete with a founding document that one of Mathewson's interns had cribbed from the United Nations Charter at the Salem Public Library.[51] As one of the first such "councils of governments" in the country, it attracted attention across the United States. Not all of it was positive. The far-right columnist and commentator Dan Smoot, a vociferous critic of any and all metropolitan government proposals, called Mathewson a covert

[47] Robert Wood, *1400 Governments: the Political Economy of the New York Metropolitan Region (*Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961). The cover of the original edition depicted local governments as mushrooms popping up left and right.
[48] Roger Biles, *The Fate of Cities: Urban America and the Federal Government, 1945-2000* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 52.
[49] Thomas, Nicholas Patrick, "The Roundtables of Metroplex," 549.
[50] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame,* 108.
[51] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame,*105.

Communist in one of his radio broadcasts.[52] Indeed, if Smoot had known the source of the Council's charter, he would not have been reassured.[53]

In reality, however, Mathewson's council of governments approach to metropolitan coordination—with its reassuring reliance on "voluntary intergovernmental cooperation"—squared well with the mood of the times. The proliferation of local governments need not imply a fragmentation of the public purpose, the Council implied. Nor would it necessitate the coercive centralized authority that struck Smoot—and many others, including President Eisenhower himself—as incompatible with the American tradition of local government.[54] A congratulatory letter to Oregon Governor Mark Hatfield from President Eisenhower, commemorating the establishment of the Council, summarized the point:

> Your concept of 'massive cooperation' as an antidote to the centralizing tendencies of our governmental structure is completely in accord with my own philosophy…Your Intergovernmental Cooperation Council could well bring the kind of lasting results that can only come from agreement on the part of the people back home who must live with the situation created by our tremendous nationwide urban growth. I am sure we both agree that it is utterly impossible and it would be unwise for the Federal Government to attempt to dictate answers for the many complex and diverse needs of more than 190 metropolitan areas. I would hope that we may see the Oregon concept spread—and quickly—to the other States in our Union.[55]

The voluntary cooperation model for metropolitan governance promised practical results without the political fallout that might result from abrogating local privileges.

Skeptics may well have observed that the Salem area was not entirely typical of U.S. metropolitan areas. For one thing, Salem was tiny. At 50,000 residents, the city had a population less than half that of the Detroit suburb of Dearborn. (The entire state of Oregon, with 1.7 million residents in 1960, was only slightly more populous than the city of Detroit.) Salem's major industry—state government—was firmly entrenched in the central city, with little prospect of a

[52] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame,* 111.
[53] Like postwar grassroots conservatism in general, the history of far-right opposition to planning in the United States has not been adequately studied. The elaborate fold-out "MetroChart" in syndicated columnist Jo Hindman's *Blame Metro* (1968) linked the American Society of Planning Officials and a range of other groups to such agents as the United Nations and Communist Yugoslavia. Jo Hindman, *Blame Metro: When Urban Renewal Strikes, When Laws Oppress* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1968).
[54] Biles, *The Fate of Cities,* 52.
[55] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame,* 109-10.

suburban relocation. In fact, Salem had no major incorporated suburban municipalities that might look with suspicion on central-city initiatives. Finally, Salem's demographics were particularly unrepresentative of the nation's larger cities and many of its smaller ones. At a time when the postwar phase of the Great Migration was reshaping urban America, Salem was 99.0% white in 1960, a legacy of Oregon's history as an officially whites-only state. Black residents of Salem numbered only 152—fewer than the appointees to Mathewson's intergovernmental study committee.[56]

Still, there was little doubt that the Intergovernmental Cooperation Council had distinguished Mathewson as a trailblazer, and the Ford Foundation's Ylvisaker had not forgotten him. Mathewson had picked up a love of fishing in North Carolina, and made frequent trips into the Cascade Mountains to visit the trout streams there. One afternoon in 1963, he was standing in the Metolius River near the village of Camp Sherman when the owner of the nearby country store came running out to see him. There was a caller asking for Mathewson, he said. Standing outside the store in his waders, fishing rod still in hand, Mathewson picked up a telephone attached to a Ponderosa pine and heard the voice of Henry Ford II.[57]

Men of the Metropolitan Fund

Before the year was out, Mathewson and his family were on the road to Detroit. Recuperating from a cold on the long drive, he asked his son Bill to read him a report on the water politics of suburban Oakland County.[58] After considering the old-money suburbs of Grosse Pointe, where his father had been educated, the family settled in the newer suburb of Bloomfield Hills, farther from downtown Detroit but set amidst central Oakland County's rolling hills and sparkling lakes.[59] Mathewson's house on Chablis Drive was twenty-five miles from downtown, but the distance could be easily travelled on the new expressways then being carved through the city. The Metropolitan Fund's office in a brand-new downtown skyscraper, directly opposite the

[56] Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States," U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division Working Paper No. 76, February 2005, accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.pdf. See Darrell Millner, "Blacks in Oregon," in *The Oregon Encyclopedia,* Oregon Historical Society, updated July 10, 2019, https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/blacks_in_oregon/#.XjywtWhKi00, accessed January 31, 2021.
[57] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame*, 119.
[58] Interview with Bill Mathewson, Ann Arbor, MI, March 13, 2018.
[59] Hall, *Keeper of the Flame,*127.

new City-County Building, gave Mathewson convenient access to many of the metropolitan region's leading citizens.

Indeed, a large proportion of those individuals sat on the Metropolitan Fund's Board of Trustees. By 1965, the trustees encompassed 58 men, including a roughly equal proportion from the region's public officials and its private sector leadership, plus the presidents and top university officials of the University of Michigan, Wayne State, Michigan State, and the University of Detroit. They included the presidents of the Big Three automakers as well as executives of the region's major utilities and banks. The six county board chairmen of the SICC member counties were included, as was SICC director Gerald Coleman, SICC founder Edward Connor, and Regional Planning Commission chairman R.J. Alexander. Unlike SICC, however, the Metropolitan Fund board also encompassed Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanagh—who sat on the Executive Committee—and five other mayors, representing the older urban centers of Monroe, Pontiac, Ann Arbor, and Port Huron as well as the Macomb County suburb of Warren.[60]

Notably, the trustees also included an elder leader of Detroit's Jewish community, Samuel Rubiner,[61] as well as three prominent members of what was then known as Detroit's Negro community—James McClendon, Wade McCree, Jr, and Richard Austin. Reflecting the degree of exclusion faced by black Detroiters from both business and politics, none of these men held elected office or leadership positions in major corporations, in sharp contrast to the white trustees. McClendon was a doctor who had been elected president of Detroit's NAACP chapter in the late 1930s.[62] McCree, who became the first black judge in Michigan when appointed to the Wayne County Circuit Court in 1954, had been appointed a federal judge by President Kennedy.[63] Of the three, Richard Austin was probably the most influential, and the only one who had been raised and educated in Detroit. After graduating first in his class from Cass Technical High School, he had become Michigan's first black certified public accountant. In some ways, however, Austin—like McCree and McClendon—represented an older generation of black leadership in Detroit, a group that predated the rise of the civil rights movement and the

[60] Metropolitan Fund, Inc., "Regional Organization: Part One," (Detroit, MI: May 1965), vii.
[61] Sidney M. Bolkosky, *Harmony and Dissonance: Voices of Jewish Identity in Detroit, 1914-1967* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 339.
[62] Historic Boston-Edison Association, "Physicians, Educators, and Organization Leaders of the Boston-Edison District," https://www.historicbostonedison.org/Physicians-&-Educators-of-BE , accessed December 18, 2018.
[63] "Wade McCree, Former U.S. Solicitor, Dies at 67," *The Washington Post,* September 1, 1987.

emboldened activism of the 1960s. In the primary election of 1964, Austin had narrowly lost the Democratic nomination for Congress to labor lawyer John Conyers, who was sixteen years his junior.[64]

The Metropolitan Fund's board was relatively light on the new generation of suburban municipal leaders, with the exception of Warren Mayor William Shaw. Some of the chairs of the County Board of Supervisors also represented suburban cities: Edward J. Bonior of Macomb County, for example, was also the mayor of the suburb of East Detroit. But the County chairs were just as likely to come from more rural areas, like Delos Hamlin, the Oakland County farmer and Board of Commissioners chair who served as Vice Chair for the Fund. The mayors of Monroe, Pontiac, Port Huron and Ann Arbor were "suburban" in the sense that their cities had increasingly been incorporated into the broader metropolitan economy. However, each of those cities had a long history that preceded Detroit's suburbanization. The second-largest city in the six-county region—and the fourth-largest city in Michigan, after Detroit, Flint and Grand Rapids—was the suburb of Dearborn, home of Ford's headquarters and famed River Rouge plant. But Dearborn Mayor Orville Hubbard, a nationally known segregationist who took pride in his efforts to keep his city all-white, did not sit on the Metropolitan Fund board.[65]

At the time, however, the Metropolitan Fund's board probably seemed—to most of its members—a fairly representative collection of the southeast Michigan region's most prominent citizens. Now it was up to Mathewson to bring them into agreement on a plan for "massive cooperation" in the Motor City region.

Blueprint for Reform

The Fund's first milestone under Mathewson was overseeing a report on local government purchasing practices in the metropolitan area. Conducted by a University of Detroit professor, the study estimated that local governments in southeast Michigan could save $15 million each year if they established cooperative metropolitan purchasing arrangements, like the one that tri-county school districts already used to supply their classrooms with typewriters. The

[64] Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, "Richard H. Austin Collection [finding aid]," https://reuther.wayne.edu/files/UP000421.pdf, accessed December 18, 2018.
[65] See David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy & White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 284-328.

report received positive coverage in the *Detroit Free Press,* which described it as the fund's "first major project."[66] It was difficult to argue with saving taxpayer dollars.

The *Free Press* did not mention that the Metropolitan Fund had already taken delivery of another study with far more sweeping implications. In 1964, the Fund had engaged the nonprofit Citizens Research Council and several professors from the University of Michigan, Wayne State University, and Michigan State University to survey local elected officials and prepare a study of "Governmental Organization for Metropolitan Southeast Michigan." The professors submitted their 170-page report in January of 1965. It provided a detailed analysis of existing local government arrangements in the six-county region, including detailed evaluations of the Detroit water system, the Regional Planning Commission, and the Supervisors Inter-County Committee. Based on that analysis, it recommended a major overhaul of regional planning and governance in greater Detroit—along the lines of Mathewson's Mid-Willamette organization.[67]

The section on the Regional Planning Commission presented an especially sharp picture of the agency's weaknesses. In the 1950s battle over water between Wayne County and the City of Detroit, the report noted, the role of the RPC had been "peripheral at best, and even on the periphery, minimal—possibly ascribable to the fact that the major contestants were strongly represented on the Commission." In the contest over the location of Detroit's major airport, the RPC had been sidelined again. "The issue was ultimately decided, not by the science and logic of modern regional planning techniques, but by the superior political generalship of the Wayne County Road Commission and its allies." Nor had the Regional Planning Commission ever settled a dispute over highway planning. In conclusion:

> The governments concerned with major regional problems have slugged, slogged, waded, swum, stumbled and staggered through to solutions (or stalemates) largely without reference to regional planning or the Regional Planning Commission.
>
> Regional problems devolved into disputes to be settled by the application of political power and maneuver—sometimes with less than salutary results, nearly always after substantial loss of time.[68]

[66] Phil Corner, "Purchasing is Sloppy, Local Agencies Told," *Detroit Free Press*, May 17, 1965, 3A.
[67] Metropolitan Fund, Inc., "Regional Organization: Part One," (Detroit, MI: May 1965).
[68] Metropolitan Fund, Inc., "Regional Organization: Part Two," (Detroit, MI: May 1965), 86.

To an extent, this was the result of structural factors: the RPC's dependence on its constituent governments' financial support and the reluctance of those governments to cede power. Most of all, however, the report blamed the RPC's narrow conception of its mission, which led it to focus on a "generalized land use plan" instead of taking on a larger role in planning the regional infrastructure facilities that actually guided metropolitan development.[69]

The Supervisors Inter-County Committee fared better in the report. It had been assessed by University of Michigan professor William R. Gable in an article entitled "The Metropolitan Council as a Device to Foster and Coordinate Intergovernmental Cooperation." Gable observed that over the decade since SICC's initial organization, metropolitan councils had been established in several other metropolitan regions, including San Francisco, Seattle and New York City as well as Salem. "There is presently some criticism of SICC," Gable wrote, "that it is not keeping up with the changing nature of the Detroit Metropolitan Area and that voluntary councils and other forms of intergovernmental cooperation are being used to better advantage elsewhere."[70]

Gable offered several "alternatives" for consideration. Taken together, they amounted to a blueprint for transforming SICC by expanding its political base beyond the county governments and improving its technical capacity. First, Gable suggested, SICC should be reorganized "to provide equal weight for the municipalities in each county," not just county government. Second, SICC should be provided with "a permanent urban study staff" that would allow it to conduct its own research and planning. A potential basis for that staff already existed. "The Regional Planning Commission," Gable noted, "might well be placed within the operating framework of a combined Inter-County Municipal Metropolitan Council or Committee."

The Summary Report to the Metropolitan Fund built on Gable's recommendations to develop a clear plan for action. "Voluntary intergovernmental cooperation among the local governments of Southeast Michigan has proven to be the most feasible and desirable means to cope with area-wide problems," the researchers concluded. SICC had "served effectively," but its structure should be expanded to include representatives from all local governments that wished to pay fees to support the organization, including incorporated cities and villages, townships, and school districts. Since this would bring the new Council of Governments' total

[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid, 102.

potential number of members to a staggering 404, the organization might consider two main legislative bodies: a "general assembly," including all member governments, and a smaller executive body, representative of the larger whole. The executive, the report stated, should include "representation from each type of unit in each county in the area," and should specifically include direct representation for the City of Detroit. Furthermore, as Gable had recommended, the functions of the Regional Planning Commission should be shifted to the COG. This would "enable the Council to more intelligently evaluate regional problems and their solutions," and, by attaching the planning staff to top elected officials, it would "increase the likelihood of the planning being implemented."[71]

In one important respect, the new Council of Governments would not differ from its predecessors. It would not be a government unto itself, with the authority to compel membership, tax or provide public services directly. The researchers had categorically rejected the formation of a full-fledged metropolitan government, after the Toronto model. "In the absence of a major crisis in the provision of local government services in the area," they wrote, "such a drastic move is believed to be politically impractical, and no such crisis exists in Southeast Michigan." Furthermore, "even if such a solution were politically feasible, it would not necessarily be desirable." No such multi-county metropolitan government had ever been tried in the United States, and such a government would be "too big to function as a truly local unit of government representative of the diverse interests of the citizens who reside in the metropolitan complex."[72]

Unstated in the proposal was an important question: if the Council of Governments was not a government, what was it? The professors argued that it would provide a device for "improving communication and thus cooperation…Its power will be persuasion, not coercion."[73] But as the example of the SICC had indicated, communication did not ensure cooperation. Could persuasion suffice to bring about consensus on the range of issues facing the metropolitan region? Could the Council survive as a voluntary organization, vulnerable to exit by any disaffected member?

Such questions had precedents in the American political tradition, as Paul Ylvisaker had observed. His call for a "metropolitan federalism" cited the U.S. Constitution, with its balancing of power between state and nation. The Constitution, of course, had not fully settled the question

[71] Ibid, xxiv.
[72] Metropolitan Fund, Inc., "Regional Organization: Part One," (Detroit, MI: May 1965), xxi.
[73] Ibid, xxv.

of state and federal prerogatives. Federal troops had ultimately helped answer it, at Gettysburg and elsewhere, but in 1965, it was clear that secession's challenge to federalism had only been partially settled. As the Metropolitan Fund's board members reviewed the report, events in Selma, Alabama provided a vivid reminder of that fact.

By establishing a larger role for Detroit and other cities, however, the COG proposal did mark a significant change from the SICC. And for the time being, the political landscape of greater Detroit's governments appeared considerably less polarized than the situation on Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge. Perhaps, as the professors argued, the COG proposal's merit lay in its ability to redress their failure to communicate.

Towards a COG Consensus

Pursuant to the bylaws of the Metropolitan Fund, all members of its board of trustees were invited to read the policy recommendations the professors had delivered, provide comments, and cast ballots to support or oppose their adoption. "I am pleased to advise," Mathewson wrote the board in May, "that support of the recommendations was nearly unanimous."[74]

Most of the comments on the report came from SICC director Gerard Coleman, whose organization would be most directly affected by its implementation. Coleman took issue with several items in the report, including the notion that SICC's structure excluded cities and townships from representation. Since county boards of supervisors were themselves composed of local elected officials, Coleman argued, this charge was not entirely fair.[75] Coleman also questioned the recommendation that school districts be represented in the new organization, arguing that school districts had traditionally been regarded as "separate and apart from the functions of other local units of government," and lacked common interests with general-purpose governments, other than "competition for the local property tax dollar." In this, he was countered with comments from Joseph Hudson, owner of Detroit's Hudson's department store chain. Hudson noted that the region's school districts employed as many people as all other local governments combined, and increasingly collaborated with other agencies "in the wars on crime

[74] Ibid, v.
[75] Metropolitan Fund, Inc., "Regional Organization: Part Two," (Detroit, MI: May 1965), 96.

and poverty."[76] Even Coleman, however, refrained from formal dissent. He acknowledged that the proposed restructuring of SICC "undoubtedly has considerable merit," while hastening to add that it required "much thoughtful consideration on the part of the present Supervisors Inter-County Committee."[77]

With this vote of confidence, and assent (grudging or not) from Coleman, Mathewson moved to put the report's recommendations into action. He convened a committee of 100 local elected officials to oversee the process, including three subcommittees on finance, representation, and functions and organization. These were chaired, respectively, by Royal Oak Mayor L. Curtis Potter, East Detroit Mayor Edward Bonior, and Detroit's Mayor Cavanagh, a group that represented all three of greater Detroit's most populous counties.[78]

On May 4, 1967, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments held its first official meeting. The event took place at the Civic Center Recreation Building in Southfield, the fast-growing Oakland County suburb on Detroit's northwest side. A few miles to the south sprawled the 161-acre Northland Center shopping mall, one of the first and largest in the country.[79] Perhaps the suburban location had been intended to reassure suburban elected officials that the COG, like SICC, would not be a Detroit-dominated organization. It may also have been chosen for convenience. Southfield sat very nearly at the exact geographic center of the seven-county region, and enjoyed easy access to many major area thoroughfares, including a recently completed extension of the Lodge Expressway.

The meeting came to order at 3 in the afternoon. Royal Oak's Mayor Potter read a congratulatory telegram from Vice-President Hubert Humphrey. Detroit Common Council member and former city planner Mel Ravitz delivered the keynote address, which he titled "The Committee of 100 and its Challenge." Ravitz described himself as "hopeful" regarding the Council of Governments, though he emphasized that it was no panacea.

> I happen to be a strong believer in the value of a Council of Governments at this stage of our development. But I do not want to be misunderstood or seem unduly optimistic.

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[76] Metropolitan Fund, Inc., "Regional Organization: Part One," (Detroit, MI: May 1965), 69. Hudson's comments were seconded by Leonard Woodcock of the United Auto Workers.
[77] Metropolitan Fund, Inc., "Regional Organization: Part Two," (Detroit, MI: May 1965), 107.
[78] Committee of 100, "Purposes, Assumptions, Organization, Procedures and Study Areas for Committee of One Hundred," October 22, 1965, in SEMCOG Papers, Box 89, "Functions and Organization Subcommittee."
[79] "The Real Detroit," *Detroit News* and Mayor's Committee for Economic Growth, May 21, 1961, 20.

> Make no mistake: the Council of Governments has limitations. It may even fail. But do not overlook that it has immense possibilities for a large step forward. It will provide for greater grass roots participation – albeit of officials – but this is good and in tune with the trend. I believe the Council of Governments is a reasonable plan for our regional future. There are those, I know, who argue that planners make mistakes. This I do not deny; but we should also note that those who never plan also make mistakes – more often, costly mistakes…
>
> The time is long since past when we could afford the luxury of narrow, provincial thinking. As the region and the population have grown, so too must our concepts and our administrative mechanisms grow. The Council of Governments is the next reasonable step forward to permit us to tackle the pressing urban problems ahead.

The membership appointed Ravitz and Potter to the Steering Committee for the new organization, along with Oakland County Board of Commissioners chair Delos Hamlin, Macomb school board member Glen Peters, and Dearborn Corporation Counsel Ralph Guy, Jr. The meeting adjourned at 4:45.[80] Those who had followed the development of the region's metropolitan institutions over the previous twenty years might have reflected on the absence of one individual in particular. Edward Connor had succumbed to a heart attack three months earlier, at the age of 58, a month after taking his new seat as a judge at Detroit Recorder's Court.[81]

Urban Problems: July 1967

Over the four years since Kent Mathewson had first arrived for his interview at the Detroit Club, Detroit and other American cities had been powerfully affected by the growth of the black freedom movement in the North. On June 23, 1963, the 20th anniversary of the 1943 Detroit riot, more than 125,000 people had paraded down Woodward Avenue in the largest civil rights demonstration in U.S. history to that point. Organized by a group led by Detroit's Rev. C.L. Franklin, minister of New Bethel Baptist Church, the "Walk to Freedom" ended at Cobo Arena with speeches by Mayor Cavanagh, the United Auto Workers' Walter Reuther, and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

[80] "Minutes of First Meeting," Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, May 4, 1965, in SEMCOG Papers, Box 99, Folder 18.
[81] "Death Takes Ed Connor," *Detroit Free Press*, February 19, 1967, 1A.

In his concluding speech, two months before the March on Washington, King made his first use of the refrain "I have a dream." As he expressed, the demonstration was both a show of solidarity with the movement in the South and a bold assertion of the black community's growing power in Detroit. In the arena named for the segregationist mayor who had still held power just six years earlier, King praised the "magnificent new militancy" on display and urged the audience to "work with determination to get rid of any segregation and discrimination in Detroit, realizing that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," and that "*de facto* segregation in the North is just as injurious as the actual segregation in the South." He cited discrimination in housing and employment and the "*de facto*" racial segregation in public schools. "I have a dream," King proclaimed in his peroration, "that one day right here in Detroit, Negroes will be able to buy a house or rent a house anywhere that their money will carry them and they will be able to get a job," drawing shouts of "that's right!"[82]

Despite the new militancy, however, and the ascension of Cavanagh, Ravitz and other liberals to city government, civil rights struggles in Detroit continued to meet vociferous resistance from the city's white majority. In 1964, following the defeat of Patrick and Ravitz's open occupancy ordinance, white neighborhood organizations successfully placed a referendum on the city ballot for a Homeowners' Rights Ordinance that would protect the "right" to discriminate in selling one's home. Despite a concerted campaign by liberals to defeat the measure, it passed, prompting a two-year battle over its constitutionality. In the same election, city voters also shot down a bond proposal to fund the construction of a new high school—a racially loaded decision, since the Detroit electorate was still less than one-third black and the Detroit Public Schools were at the point of tipping towards a majority-black student body.[83]

The most explosive issue was the one that had propelled Cavanagh into office: the conduct of Detroit's nearly all-white police force towards black citizens. Cavanagh had initially pleased black leaders with his appointment of liberal reformer George Edwards to the position of Police Commissioner. However, Edwards resisted their demand for a civilian review board to investigate police brutality, and also faced fierce opposition from white conservatives like

[82] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at the Freedom Rally in Cobo Hall," Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/address-freedom-rally-cobo-hall, accessed February 7, 2020.
[83] Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 137-9; Arthur Johnson, *Race and Remembrance* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 84. Many of Detroit's white students attended Catholic schools.

Common Council's William Rogell, who complained that "Edwards' main goal in his job is to appease the Negro."[84] Edwards resigned in 1963, and Cavanagh's reform efforts bore little immediate fruit in the profoundly racist Detroit Police Department.[85]

Over the summer of 1966, on the heels of the previous year's Watts uprising in Los Angeles, altercations between residents and police in Chicago and Cleveland escalated into larger conflagrations that left seven people dead, all of them black residents killed by police, National Guardsmen, white vigilantes, or "stray bullets."[86] Despite Detroit's public image as a progressive "model city," an image cultivated by Mayor Cavanagh and taken at face value by many members of the civic elite, black residents and city officials were increasingly on edge. A 1966 altercation between Detroit police and black youths on Kercheval Street on the city's east side put authorities on high alert. State Senate candidate Coleman Young, who was in the running to become that house's second black legislator, happened to be in the neighborhood hosting a wake for his late father. On learning of the incident, he quickly mobilized a group of black and white leaders, including Detroit Congressman Charles Diggs, to walk Kercheval and keep the peace. As Young later recounted, some of the DPD rank-and-file were less interested in de-escalating the situation. "You goddamn niggers get your black asses off the street," one officer growled at the group as a line of police cruisers drove past them. In June of 1967, a month after the inaugural SEMCOG meeting, urban uprisings occurred in Tampa, Cincinnati, Atlanta, and finally Newark, New Jersey, where 23 died.

In Detroit, the spark came at the corner of Twelfth and Clairmount, in the heart of the densely populated black West Side. The neighborhood had been entirely white just two decades earlier, but in the wake of the war, as its mostly Jewish residents moved out, it became a destination for black Detroiters escaping the overcrowded East Side enclaves of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. In the 1950s, as Mayor Cobo's bulldozers flattened those neighborhoods in the name of "urban renewal," the migration became a flood. "Within a few years," recounted Coleman Young, who along with his wife had been one of the first black residents to "integrate" an all-white block off Twelfth Street (and was forced to pay twice as much in rent for his one-

[84] Mary M. Stolberg, *Bridging the River of Hatred: The Pioneering Efforts of Detroit Police Commissioner George Edwards* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 239-240.
[85] Coleman Young and Lonnie Wheeler, *Hard Stuff: The Autobiography of Mayor Coleman Young* (New York: Viking, 1994), 167-8.
[86] National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam, 1968), 39.

bedroom apartment as its previous white occupants had), "the entire Twelfth Street community was one of the most densely populated areas in the country, an impoverished, underequipped, irritable and desperate neighborhood that trebled the problems of Black Bottom while inheriting little of its charisma."[87]

Tens of thousands of commuters from northwest Detroit and the Oakland County suburbs passed by the neighborhood every day on the Lodge Expressway, which linked the downtown to northwest Detroit and the Oakland County suburbs beyond. Kent Mathewson was probably one of them; he was usually running too late in the mornings to catch the Grand Trunk Railroad commuter train that still ferried businessmen downtown from suburban stations in Pontiac, Birmingham and Royal Oak.[88] From the trench of the expressway, the commuters could glimpse some of the adjacent buildings, and sometimes even the residents of the neighborhood as they crossed the bridges overhead. How the people of Twelfth Street factored into the "metropolitan problem" was not clear. In 1964, the task of planning "operational attacks" on "pockets of poverty" had been added to the Metropolitan Fund's list of objectives,[89] but there had been little or no discussion of racial segregation and inequality in crafting the structure of SEMCOG.

In the early morning of July 23, 1967, less than three months after the first SEMCOG meeting in Southfield, the residents of Twelfth Street made their presence known. In the aftermath, as SEMCOG attempted to make the case for regional cooperation, Detroit's "metropolitan problem" took on a politically incendiary new dimension.

[87] Coleman Young and Lonnie Wheeler, *Hard Stuff: The Autobiography of Mayor Coleman Young* (New York: Viking, 1994), 147.
[88] Interview with Bill Mathewson, Ann Arbor, MI, March 13, 2018.
[89] Thomas,"The Roundtables of Metroplex," 554.

Chapter 3: A Region in Revolt

On June 12, 1967, residents of the exclusive riverfront suburbs just east of Detroit went to the polls to elect two new members of the Grosse Pointe School Board. Many years after Kent Mathewson's father had attended the Grosse Pointe Academy, the people of the Pointes still took a strong interest in the schools that, they hoped, would maintain their municipalities' prestige and prepare their children to prosper as well."The area included within the Grosse Pointe School District is often described as a suburban, residential community without a major industry," observed psychoanalyst and incumbent School Board President Frank H. Parcells, in his *Grosse Pointe News* campaign ad. "NOT SO! Education is our major industry. The educated, knowledgable [sic], inquiring young citizen is our product."[1] Another candidate, a Ford Motor Company attorney named Bert H. Wicking, reminded voters that "[c]onsistent land values are dependent on a stable, conservative, fiscally responsible school board."[2] In the 1967 election, however, a new issue came to the fore: the fledgling Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, which two insurgent candidates claimed might mean the end of the Grosse Pointe school district and its privileges.

How Arnold P. Fuchs and Calvin J. Sandberg first decided to challenge the Council of Governments is not clear. Fuchs was Missile Division Program Manager for one of the Big Three automakers; Sandberg an Air Force veteran and engineer now working as a "professional writer and research analyst." While other candidates for school board stressed their own personal and professional qualifications, Fuchs and Sandberg campaigned with a manifesto to ensure local control of the Grosse Pointe Schools by keeping the district out of SEMCOG. "AT LEAST YOU KNOW WHERE WE STAND," their ads proclaimed.

[1] "Vote for Dr. Frank Parcells" [advertisement], *Grosse Pointe News*, June 8, 1967, 6; "6 Candidates Seek School Board Seats," *Grosse Pointe News*, June 8, 1967, 1.
[2] "Bert H. Wicking for Grosse Pointe Board of Education [advertisement], *Grosse Pointe News*, June 8, 1967, 11.

> We stand:
>
> For the retention of complete local control of our school system by the citizens of the Grosse Pointe School District, to whom it belongs.
>
> For the preservation and continued development of a school system uniquely equipped to prepare the children of the Grosse Pointe School District for the higher educations and positions of leadership for which they are destined.
>
> We reject:
>
> The theory that neither of the foregoing principles would, in any way be compromised by the assimilation of our School District into a regional concept such as the proposed Council of Governments our current school board intends to join."[3]

The advertisement made no explicit mention of race, but Grosse Pointe residents were well aware that the Detroit Public Schools had recently gained a majority-black student population, and that white Detroiters were abandoning many of the East Side neighborhoods adjacent to the Pointes.[4]

Fuchs and Sandberg's charges were met with bewilderment by the Grosse Pointe educational establishment. Acting School Superintendent J. Harold Husband assured residents that according to Michigan law, a school district could not be "assimilated" without a vote of the people. Board President Parcells urged voters to disregard "irresponsible criticisms." Yet another candidate, Alan Neef, took the Fuchs and Sandberg line seriously enough to pledge his own commitment to "maintaining educational excellance [sic]…for our own children undiluted by outside students who are not our direct concern."[5] On Election Day, however, Fuchs and Sandberg triumphed as almost twice the usual number of voters went to the polls.[6]

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[3] "Of the candidates for the school board…AT LEAST YOU KNOW WHERE WE STAND" [advertisement], *Grosse Pointe News*, June 8, 1967, 4. A book by 1964 presidential candidate Barry Goldwater had also been titled *Where I Stand*, and it is possible that like many other suburban conservatives, Fuchs and Sandberg had been inspired to take local action in the wake of the Goldwater campaign. See Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[4] The Detroit Public Schools gained an overall black majority in 1962, although high school enrollment remained majority-white until 1967. Stephen B. Lawton and Gregory L. Curtner, "Black Schools, White Schools: A Descriptive Analysis of School Attendance Patterns in Detroit," Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, June 1972, 37. See maps in Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 183-7.

[5] "Vote for Dr. Frank Parcells" [advertisement], *Grosse Pointe News*, June 8, 1967, 6.

[6] "Voters Shun Polls Again," *Grosse Pointe News*, June 15, 1967, 1. The headline refers to the fact that turnout was still a minority of registered voters.

The challenge to the fledgling Council of Governments in the 1967 election for Grosse Pointe School Board foreshadowed a growing tide of opposition to the institution that gained strength in the months and years to come. When Kent Mathewson arrived in Detroit, almost no one framed the "metropolitan problem" as an issue of race or inequality. As the civil rights movement began to challenge segregation in North, however, and particularly after the uprising of 1967, the "metropolitan problem" came to be understood by many people—black and white, left and right—as essentially a racial problem, the latest permutation of the "American dilemma." In that context, new metropolitan institutions came under immediate scrutiny by whites and blacks alike. SEMCOG would strive mightily to dispense with any notion that it sought to desegregate the suburbs, on the one hand, or dismantle black political power in the central city, on the other. Ultimately, as Mathewson found to his chagrin, the Council of Governments would only survive by taking a hard line against the stronger metropolitan government that he had begun to champion.

From New COG to New Detroit

By the time of the Grosse Pointe school board elections, stirrings of opposition to SEMCOG had also manifested in Lansing. As early as June, Mel Ravitz of SEMCOG's steering committee had noted "strong conservative opposition" to the bills that would provide a formal legal basis for councils of government.[7] One of the leading opponents was State Senator Robert Huber, Republican and chair of the Senate's Municipalities Committee. The owner of a Detroit manufacturing firm, Huber had previously served as the mayor of Troy, one of the region's fastest-growing suburbs. His public and private roles were sometimes difficult to distinguish: during Huber's term as Mayor, the City of Troy had purchased the eighty-acre Huber farm to be developed as a new Civic Center.[8]

On Thursday, July 20, 1967, Huber's Municipalities Committee and the Taxation Committee held a joint hearing at Detroit's City-County Building on the proposals that would lay

[7] Telegram from Mel Ravitz, June 20, 1967, MRP, Box 60, Folder 12.
[8] Troy Historic Village, "July 15—Mayor Robert Huber," July 15, 2015, https://www.troyhistoricvillage.org/july-1-mayor-robert-huber, accessed August 4, 2020. Troy's population doubled during the 1960s, from 19,000 to 39,000. Such convergences of public and private interest were not limited to Huber. "The business of government in Troy is business," the *Detroit Free Press* noted, "and the common activity of some Troy officials has been to dabble in land speculation at the same time they are setting policies affecting the growth and development of the city." William Meek, "Troy, Damman Grew Together," *Detroit Free Press*, November 2, 1974, 3A.

a foundation for the Council of Governments. The event drew a set of speakers who described metropolitan government as a "Communist plot," using the talking points that conservative commentators like Dan Smoot and Jo Hindman had popularized. "You want to do away with the last vestige of home rule and brainwash innocent people into the viselike grip of metropolitan government," fulminated Anderson Arberry, an orthodontist from the city of Midland, a hundred miles from Detroit. "COG isn't new," charged Madeline Darrow of St. Clair Shores. "It's been in Russia for several years," she said, noting that Miami officials voted to create their metropolitan government shortly after a trip to Moscow.[9]

Actual municipal officials, however, seem to have been conspicuously absent from the opposition. Indeed, the *News* noted, several local officials from the northern suburbs spoke in favor of the COG legislation, including Glen Peters of the Macomb County Board of Education, representing the Michigan Association of Schools; William Mainland, Oakland Township Supervisor, who represented the Michigan Townships Association; and Delos Hamlin, chair of the Oakland County Board of Supervisors.[10] This seemed to square with Hamlin's description of the opposition, according to the *News*, as "a tiny but active group of ultraconservatives."[11] The most vocal opposition in the metropolitan area, the *News* stated, had originated in the Grosse Pointe communities, where, the *News* noted, school board candidates had charged that the Council of Governments would "meddle in the racial composition of school enrollments and force the opening of municipal parks to outsiders."[12]

The *News* treatment of the Detroit SEMCOG hearing implied that opposition to the organization was a fringe opinion. This was probably true on July 20, 1967. Most suburbanites certainly would have opposed any consolidation of school districts with Detroit, but such action was hard for them to imagine. A few days later, however, a police raid on Twelfth Street touched off the Detroit uprising of 1967, and, eventually, a high-stakes debate over what the suburbs owed to the central city.

The Detroit rebellion of 1967 has taken on a mythic significance somewhat out of proportion to the actual damage that rioters caused over five days of protest. Despite initial estimates of property damage valued at up to $500 million, the total was ultimately estimated at

[9] Richard Ryan, "Area Council Hailed, Lambasted," *Detroit News,* July 21, 1967, 10.
[10] Richard Ryan, "Area Council Hailed, Lambasted," *Detroit News,* July 21, 1967, 10.
[11] Allen Phillips,"COG Moves Closer Despite Opposition," *Detroit News,* June 15, 1967.
[12] Ibid.

less than $45 million.[13] About two thousand buildings were looted or burned, a number greatly increased by the strong winds that spread flames from commercial streets to adjacent residential areas.[14] Governor George Romney stated that Detroit looked as though it had suffered an aerial bombardment, but in fact much of the city was physically untouched by the rebellion. In terms of brick and mortar turned to rubble, urban renewal and expressway construction over the previous two decades had wreaked far more extensive damage. The construction of the Lodge Expressway alone had destroyed nearly three thousand structures.[15] In fact, the physical destruction of the overcrowded inner city struck officials still committed to "urban renewal" by clearance as a silver lining. "The tragedy," remarked one of Mayor Cavanagh's aides, "was not that so much of the city was burned, but so little."[16]

Forty-three people lost their lives in the rebellion. Yet that toll marked the force with which the rebellion was subdued much more than it did the fury of the rioters. At least thirty of the dead were killed by law enforcement personnel. Only two of the dead were killed by rioters: a Detroit firefighter and the owner of a shoe store. One hundred and seventy-five people had been murdered in Detroit in the previous year alone.[17]

What cannot be underestimated is the rebellion's psychological impact. For white residents of the region, in particular, the events of July 1967 ignited fears and anxieties that had smoldered for decades. By that time, a generation had grown up under the conditions of residential segregation mandated by federal and local policy. In this context, large portions of the white community succumbed to hysteria fed by sensational media reports of black militancy. Rumors circulated that the next rebellion would involve a black invasion of the suburbs. Handgun registrations skyrocketed, and the police departments of Dearborn and Livonia hosted target practice classes for their residents. Hubert Locke, one of the highest-ranking black officials in the administration of Mayor Cavanagh, theorized that whites furthest removed from Detroit's black community were most susceptible to the rumors. Yet the white Detroit neighborhoods on the frontlines of racial transition also proved fertile ground for fear. The *Northeast Detroiter*, a neighborhood newspaper particularly attuned to its readers' anxieties,

[13] U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, (New York: Bantam, 1968), 115.
[14] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 259.
[15] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 48.
[16] Robert Conot, *American Odyssey,* 541.
[17] Conot, *American Odyssey*, 667

Figure 3.1. A block of flats off Linwood Avenue goes up in flames on the first day of the 1967 Detroit rebellion. High winds spread fires and caused widespread damage to residential areas. Rev. C.L. Franklin's New Bethel Baptist Church is visible through the smoke at upper right. Virtual Motor City Collection, Reuther Library.

printed such articles as one headlined "Civil War in Detroit's Future," which described black militants' plans for targeting white children. [18]

For a time, the uprisings in Detroit and other cities also prompted politicians and corporate leaders to advocate far-reaching proposals for metropolitan desegregation. The most eloquent statement of the liberal establishment response, the 1968 report of President Johnson's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, spotlighted the role of metropolitan segregation in racial inequality. The Kerner Report, as it came to be known, warned that America was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."[19] The two societies had a clear spatial definition: "one, largely Negro and poor, located in the central cities;

[18] Marilynn Rosenthal, "Where Rumor Raged," *Trans-action*, February 1971, 35-43.
[19] U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam, 1968), 1.

the other, predominantly white and affluent, located in the suburbs and outlying areas."[20] The Commission called for a dual program of both equalization and integration: "ghetto enrichment" complemented with "[p]rograms which will allow substantial Negro movement out of the ghettos," including an overhaul of federal housing policy to counter segregation.[21]

The Kerner Report scarcely acknowledged the role of the federal government in constructing the all-white enclaves of American suburbia.[22] However, in a chapter titled "The Formation of the Racial Ghettos," the authors stressed the magnitude of white suburbanization and the sharp distinction between the dispersal of white immigrant groups into the suburbs and the continued confinement of blacks in the central cities, a pattern of growing polarization not reducible to economics.[23] The report projected that if current trends continued, ten major cities, including Detroit, would have black majorities by 1980, and might be "nearly bankrupt," while suburbs and outlying areas would remain "generally affluent" and more than 95 percent white.[24] "Within two decades," the Commission warned, "this division could be so deep that it would be almost impossible to unite" the segregated societies. It closed the report with a call to action at the scale of the metropolitan region. "We cannot escape responsibility for choosing the future of our metropolitan areas and the human relations which develop within them. It is a responsibility so critical that even an unconscious choice to continue present policies has the gravest implications."[25]

The Kerner Report did not set out an agenda for metropolitan government. Indeed, in a paragraph on the topic, it stressed the limitations of governmental restructuring as a path to racial justice.

> Some areas might avoid political confrontation by shifting to some form of metropolitan government designed to offer regional solutions for pressing urban

[20] U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam, 1968), 22.
[21] Ibid, 22-3, 28-9. It is worth noting that although most of the Commission's report was prepared in-house, the Commission contracted with the Ford Foundation on "two major studies of white and Negro attitudes," including one conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders,* 578. Paul Ylvisaker was among the witnesses at the Commission's hearings; however, he had left the Foundation earlier in 1967 to take a position as director of the New Jersey Department of Community Relations, in which role he was involved in the response to the rebellions in Newark and other New Jersey cities.
[22]The Kerner Report's treatment of the development of housing segregation in the North is strikingly thin. The Commission did note that New Deal public housing programs "expanded urban ghettos," but did not detail the process. Ibid, 222.
[23] Ibid, 236-247.
[24] Ibid, 391-400. As of 1968, only Washington, D.C. and Newark had black majorities.
[25] Ibid, 408.

> problems such as property taxation, air and water pollution and refuse disposal, and commuter transport. Yet this would hardly eliminate the basic segregation and relative poverty of the urban Negro population. It might even increase the Negro's sense of frustration and alienation if it operated to prevent Negro political control of central cities.[26]

Metropolitan desegregation, however, stood at the heart of the Kerner recommendations, although the report remained vague on how that goal should be pursued. In addition to a national fair housing law, the commission recommended the reorientation of federal housing programs to place new low and moderate-income housing in "nonghetto areas, particularly those outside the central city."[27] It did not indicate how this goal might be accomplished in the face of local opposition.

Kent Mathewson could be counted on to have some ideas on the subject. As one of the key liaisons between the corporate directorate and the region's political leadership, he played a vital role in the business response to the rebellion. According to Wayne State professor and policing consultant Hubert Locke, it was Mathewson who helped convince Metropolitan Fund board chair Joseph Hudson to chair the New Detroit Committee, a public-private "urban coalition."[28] A study of the first five years of the organization described Mathewson as "Hudson's loyal and expert right hand in building New Detroit."[29] Mathewson advised Hudson on the selection of the committee's members, drawn from across the tri-county area, and was "directly in charge of the committee staff's operations."[30] Mathewson also convinced Hudson of the need to hire a black executive director of the new organization, and recruited former Detroit city councilman and Michigan Bell executive Bill Patrick, Jr. for the position.[31]

Like peer organizations around the country, New Detroit focused on channeling corporate resources into the "inner city" that its benefactors had largely abandoned.[32] Yet Mathewson believed that the rebellion also demanded a metropolitan response and a transformation of regional public policy. In a February 23, 1968 address at Cranbrook, the elite Bloomfield Hills

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[26] Ibid, 400.
[27] Ibid, 482.
[28] Hall, *Kent Mathewson: Keeper of the Flame*, 125.
[29] Helen M. Graves, "New Detroit Committee/New Detroit, Incorporated: a case study of an urban coalition, 1967-1972" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1975), 92.
[30] Conot, *American Odyssey*, 540; James Mudge, "Detroit Rebuilding Panel Asks Help of Community," *Detroit Free Press*, August 2, 1967, 3A.
[31] Graves, "New Detroit Committee/New Detroit, Incorporated: a case study of an urban coalition, 1967-1972," 92.
[32] Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 441.

Figure 3.2. Although Joseph Hudson (left) was the public face of the New Detroit Committee, Kent Mathewson (right) and the Metropolitan Fund played a crucial role in its establishment. Wayne State University, Virtual Motor City Collection.

Figure 3. 3. One of the nation's first "urban coalitions," the group's initial iteration brought together black Detroiters and some of the region's most powerful corporate leaders. Wayne State University, Virtual Motor City Collection.

prep school and art institute, Mathewson called for suburban residents to take responsibility for the so-called "urban crisis."

> While there is much that must be done and decided by those who live in the city, it is up to the white suburban voter and the white out-state legislator to breathe funds and taxes back into our flaking core cities. It is up to those who live 'outside of town' to narrow the income gap and revise the zoning laws that pen the inner city resident behind invisible walls of prejudice and despair…It is up to the suburbanite who works in the city to examine the possibility of regional taxation to give the unseen children below the expressway the same American opportunities that his own children enjoy.

Mathewson insisted that such action was ultimately in the interest of white suburbanites. "[T]he problem is in the suburbs…the answer is in the suburbs…and, quite naturally, the consequence of inaction will ultimately come to roost in the suburbs," he said, through "the white community's ever-increasing load of financial, physical and intellectual commitment to treat the wounds of the inner city."[33]

One of Mathewson's more creative responses to the rebellion was a proposal for "skip annexation," in which central cities would annex islands of suburban greenfield land and develop them as "new towns" with desegregated housing that could bring black residents closer to suburban jobs. Mathewson described the concept in an article in *The Nation's Cities*, the organ of the National League of Cities. In Detroit, the idea drew the support of Mayor Cavanagh, and the City Plan Commission examined the possibility of creating a "satellite city" in the undeveloped northwestern corner of Wayne County, where the City already owned two large parcels of land occupied by the Detroit House of Correction and the city's Maybury Sanatorium.[34]

Mathewson's concept of metropolitan responsibility towards black Detroiters, however, was not shared by a majority of white suburbanites. In the fall of 1967, local elections in Royal Oak spelled trouble for the Council of Governments. Royal Oak, one of Detroit's more established suburbs, was located along Woodward Avenue in southeastern Oakland County, two miles north of Detroit. By 1960 it had more than 80,000 residents, nearly all of them white. Mayor L. Curtis Potter had chaired the Metropolitan Fund's Committee of 100 as it laid the foundation for SEMCOG and had been elected temporary chairman of the General Assembly its

[33] Kent Mathewson, "The Message…Suburbia…Is Dignity," February 23, 1968, in Joseph L. Hudson Papers, "Kent Mathewson, 1968," BHL.
[34] Bruce B. Van Dusen, "Detroit Considers Plan for Suburb 'Satellite,'" *Detroit News,* October 1, 1967, 1A.

May 1967 meeting. The meeting had drawn little controversy at the time, but as Potter sought re-election for a third term in November, he faced a growing backlash against his role in SEMCOG. Of 15 candidates that year for Mayor and City Commission, only 5 unapologetically supported SEMCOG, while 6 were strongly opposed. The Detroit "riots," and the ensuing talk of action to redress racial inequity and desegregate the metropolitan area, clearly shaped the candidates' views.[35]

"The July riots indicated we must all be concerned with each other's problems," Mayor Potter told the *Tribune*, decrying opposition to SEMCOG as "isolationism." Yet he also assured constituents that "it will only be a coordinating agency, not a controlling one." The fact that SEMCOG's authority rested in the General Assembly, where each government had a vote regardless of population, "will defend against a big city ruling the roost."[36] Others disagreed. One of Potter's opponents, former City Commissioner Robert Patnales, called for a public referendum on Royal Oak's membership in SEMCOG. "I think the current COG supporters do not intend to allow it to stop with studying regional problems," Patnales told the *Tribune;* they planned to use it to attack "social problems" as well. He warned that SEMCOG "could be used as a big club to beat local cities into submission," citing a recent remark by Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, who had said that if the suburbs refused to build low-cost housing, Detroit might move to stop subsidizing water and sewer infrastructure.[37]

Mayor Potter managed to win re-election. However, several of the newly elected Commissioners did not share his support for SEMCOG, and the *Tribune* reported that the Mayor would not touch the "COG issue" until meeting with the new city council members.[38] In the wake of the 1967 rebellion, suburban fear of metropolitan institutions was no longer a fringe opinion, limited to a few ultraconservatives. SEMCOG had become a focus of white racial anxiety around policy responses to the rebellion. The *Detroit News* editorial page commented that "[t]he reason" for suburban resistance to SEMCOG "is on the tip of everyone's tongue—just short of being said out loud."[39] Over the next few years, as proposals for metropolitan desegregation roiled the metropolitan region and spurred a powerful suburban backlash, the

[35] James Ritz, "Council of Governments Issue Splits Royal Oak Candidates," *Royal Oak Daily Tribune*, November 4, 1967
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] "Potter Re-Elected RO Mayor; Four New Faces on Commission," *Royal Oak Daily Tribune*, November 8, 1967, 1.
[39] "Myopia in Lansing," *Detroit News*, October 20, 1967, 10-B.

seemingly innocuous sentiment Potter had expressed—that the people of the region "must all be concerned with each other's problems"—would become more and more toxic, to the point that not only SEMCOG's enemies but its friends would disclaim efforts to use the organization as a platform for addressing the region's racial dilemma.

"Black and White Implications"

In April 1968, metropolitan Detroit's annual planning conference took place, as it had for many years, in the marble-clad Veterans Memorial Building on the riverfront in downtown Detroit. For the first time, however, it was under the auspices of SEMCOG rather than the Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission. The conference also occurred in the shadow of the previous year's rebellion, and just three weeks after the uprisings that followed the April 4 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Over the previous year, SEMCOG had established a more solid organizational footing. The Supervisors Inter-County Committee had formally dissolved the previous November at a meeting at the Botsford Inn in Farmington.[40] Oakland County had been the first county in the region to pay its membership dues—$35,000 per year—the previous summer.[41] And after extensive debate, which focused on whether school districts should be included in the Council of Governments, State Senator Huber had allowed the authorizing legislation for COG to advance in Lansing.[42]

At the conference, SEMCOG Chair William Mainland introduced the newly hired director of SEMCOG: E. Robert Turner, the former city manager of Boulder, Colorado and Burbank, California, who had arrived on the job just one month earlier. Turner expressed gratitude at inheriting "a solid foundation of regional effort which has no parallel in any other metropolitan area of this country." Yet he also noted the long shadow of the racial upheavals of the previous year. "The tragedy of last summer and of this spring looms as a paramount preoccupation in the minds of all of us—as it should," he said. Turner closed by invoking the central importance of the region's racial dilemma:

[40] Allen Phillips, "Supervisors Unit Dies—Voluntarily," *Detroit News*, November 10, 1967, 13-D.
[41] Allen Phillips, "Oakland First to Pay COG," *Detroit News*, August 25, 1967, 9-A.
[42] Glenn Engle, "Senate Unit Cuts Powers of Government Councils," *Detroit News*, October 19, 1967, 11-B.

> As to program, I am compelled to observe that the major, over-riding social problem of our day cannot and must not be ignored. Every COG activity will be examined carefully for its black and white implications. In many respects this is tragic, but let's be honest, ladies and gentlemen, no metropolitan issue transcends this one. The sooner we address ourselves to the concept of living up to our constitution and exercise our best human and moral instincts, the better will be our chances of success in all other endeavors.[43]

Yet the new director of the Council of Governments also declared himself a "conservative" in his approach to metropolitan cooperation. "I believe that the best way to face up to the urban crisis is through the traditional, local units of government," he said, omitting the fact that the fragmentation of metropolitan Detroit into a mosaic of separate suburban governments was largely a development of the previous several decades. Turner even went so far as to say that "the concept of voluntary regional councils represents the last hope for the preservation of grass-roots democracy in this country," the only alternative to metropolitan "super government" or "escalation of federal domination."[44]

The closing speech at the conference was delivered by Detroit Common Council's Mel Ravitz. Unbeknownst to many in the crowd, Chairman Mainland had proposed that Ravitz serve as SEMCOG's first director, but the councilman demurred, writing that "my responsibility must be to the people of the city of Detroit…particularly under the duress of the immense problems that face our city."[45] In his speech to the planning conference, Ravitz noted that the city and the suburbs both faced common problems in planning. However, he underscored "the blunt fact of both racial and social class segregation, that separates the suburbs from the central city," warning that "there are some who would maintain that segregation even if it means sacrificing the COG structure and turning their backs on unified regional planning and development."

Ravitz observed that thus far, the main opposition to the COG had come from suburbanites, but he warned that black leaders in the central city also feared the potential for SEMCOG to become a new "containment structure" limiting black political power. To assuage those concerns, Ravitz urged equitable representation for the central city in COG governance, and called on suburbanites to "help break down the remaining elements of racial discrimination

[43] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments Planning Division, "17th Annual Planning Conference Conference Papers," 1968, 4-7.
[44] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments Planning Division, "17th Annual Planning Conference Conference Papers," 1968, 4-7.
[45] Mel Ravitz, letter to Lawrence Mainland, December 28, 1967, MRP, Box 60, folder 12.

and segregation," particularly in housing. "Only a complete end to this segregation in fact as well as in word or in law," he said, "can erase the growing suspicion of suburban domination." Ravitz warned that if regional planning "is unconcerned with some of the tough social issues that underlie much of what we do, then COG will be viewed as a rather meaningless entity and people will go their own way in search of better answers than COG and its regional planning division are willing to provide."[46]

Over the next several years, however, the more immediate question became whether SEMCOG would continue to exist. 114 local governments, out of the 350 eligible to join, had joined SEMCOG as dues-paying members in 1968. Yet several held up payment of their second-year dues as suspicion of the organization persisted.[47] A citizens' committee appointed by Mayor Jule Famularo of Troy, one of the fastest-growing communities in Oakland County, unanimously recommended that the city withhold its $720 contribution. The committee's report warned that "a strong metro-governmental body could erode the basic principle embodied in our constitution of one man-one vote," allow Detroit to dominate the suburbs, and increase the suburban tax burden. Mayor Famularo, perhaps influenced by his predecessor Robert Huber, stated he hoped the report would "cause a bombshell in the six-county area."[48]

SEMCOG Chair Mainland dismissed the report as "doomsday conjecture,"[49] and the *Detroit Free Press* editorial page scolded Troy for "its adamant opposition to becoming involved in downtown problems," predicting that "[e]ventually, the suburbs and the central city will become reconciled." Yet by January of 1972, more than a dozen other units of government had followed Troy's lead in dropping out of SEMCOG, bringing the total number of SEMCOG members to just 98. The absences included some of the region's largest suburbs: the cities of Warren, Southfield, and Dearborn.[50] Some local officials, like Royal Oak mayor John Austin, said they favored SEMCOG but simply could not afford to pay their dues.[51]

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[46] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments Planning Division, "17th Annual Planning Conference Conference Papers," 1968, 23-26.
[47] Don Lenhausen, "Multicity Unit Fights Metro Government," *Detroit Free Press,* February 24, 1969, 12-C; "SEMCOG No Threat," *Detroit Free Press,* June 9, 1969, 8-A.
[48] Don Lenhausen, "Troy Told: Quit Metro Council," *Detroit Free Press,* June 5, 1969, 16-D; Don Lenhausen, "Metro Unit Fights Criticism in Troy," *Detroit Free Press,* June 7, 1969, 6-B.
[49] Walker Lundy, "Regional Plan Unit Scores Its Critics on Troy Panel," *Detroit Free Press,* June 8, 1969, 4-A; "SEMCOG No Threat," *Detroit Free Press,* June 9, 1969, 8-A.
[50] Michael Maidenberg, "Local Jealousy Hurting—Ravitz," *Detroit Free Press,* January 26, 1972, 14-C.
[51] Larry Adcock, "Royal Oak Will Quit SEMCOG," *Detroit Free Press,* August 22, 1970, 3A.

It did not help that one of the projects SEMCOG absorbed from its predecessors had run into trouble. The Detroit Transportation and Land Use Study, or TALUS, a computer-based planning effort previously administered by the Regional Planning Commission, had gotten its start in 1964 under Irving Rubin, formerly the State Highway Department's chief freeway construction agent. Five years later, Rubin had spent four and a half million dollars without completing the regional plan TALUS was supposed to produce, as detailed in a February 1969 exposé in the *Detroit Free Press.*[52] SEMCOG director Turner expressed surprise at the delay, and Mainland acknowledged a "lack of confidence" in Rubin, although SEMCOG ultimately authorized another $60,000 grant to Rubin to finish the project.[53] It was not an auspicious start for the fledgling Council of Governments, and federal action against segregation in suburban schools and housing would only further suburban distrust of metropolitan initiatives.

Beginning in 1969, officials in the Chicago regional office of the Department of Housing and Urban Development began to raise concerns about federal grantmaking to the city of Warren. Just thirty years after bulldozers broke ground for its federal arms factories, Warren had become Detroit's largest suburb and one of the biggest suburbs in the nation, with nearly 180,000 residents. Warren's black population, however, consisted of no more than thirty families. HUD field representative Mary Ann Taranowski felt it obvious that in nearly all-white, working-class Warren, "whatever discrimination was going on was not economic," given Warren's "largely union workforce" and documented history of violence against black residents.[54] Black families who moved to Warren, or white residents suspected of attempting to sell their homes to blacks, could expect attacks of the kind that had typified white resistance to black settlement in Detroit over the previous several decades.[55]

The conflict escalated as HUD representatives faced off against Warren officials, particularly a faction of newer City Council members, led by a Chrysler publicist Richard Sabaugh who declared his opposition to "open housing."[56] In a May 1970 meeting in Washington, George Romney told Mayor Ted Bates that he would cut off federal urban renewal

[52] John Askins, "Big Brother TALUS Is Watching You—But Who's Been Watching TALUS?" *Detroit Free Press*, February 2, 1969, 3A.
[53] David Cooper, "Transit Study Boss Blasted," *Detroit Free Press*, February 5, 1969, 1-A; "Land Use Study Gets $60,000," *Detroit Free Press*, June 13, 1969, 11A.
[54] Richard David Riddle, "The Rise of the Reagan Democrats in Warren, Michigan (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1998), 59, 60. Economic discrimination, apparently, would have been considered legitimate.
[55] See Riddle, "The Rise of the Reagan Democrats in Warren, Michigan," 41, for the account of a garage firebombing.
[56] Riddle, "The Rise of the Reagan Democrats in Warren, Michigan," 56, 61.

funds if Warren failed to take steps towards desegregation.[57] In July, the *Detroit News* received a copy of a memorandum from the Chicago HUD office which it published under the title "U.S. Picks Warren as Prime Target in Move to Integrate All Suburbs." When Romney flew to Warren and met with suburban officials in an attempt to assuage their fears, he was confronted by hundreds of demonstrators. "Just because Warren is an all-white community, does that mean we are all racists? No," Sabaugh declared. In an August referendum, 57% of the electorate voted to reject the urban renewal program.[58]

Meanwhile, an even more explosive set of battles were brewing over the issue of school desegregation. In February 1970, federal judge Damon Keith ordered the desegregation of the school district of Pontiac, among the first orders of its kind in a Northern city.[59] In April 1970, the Detroit Board of Education voted to redraw high school attendance boundaries to promote desegregation. This action prompted organized opposition from white parents and students, drawn from the homeowner associations, who organized as the Citizens' Committee for Better Education. The Committee launched a successful recall election of the liberals on the school board and convinced the Michigan Legislature to invalidate the desegregation plan. Shortly afterwards, the NAACP sued in federal district court. The lawsuit, however, took an unexpected turn when Alexander Ritchie, the attorney for the Committee, convinced his clients that their best hope was to argue for a desegregation plan that encompassed the entire metropolitan area, including the suburbs. Ritchie formally requested this plan in July 1971, and on October 4, after finding that the Detroit Public Schools were indeed racially segregated, federal judge Stephen Roth requested the preparation of metropolitan-wide integration plans that included all 87 school districts in the region, as well as a set of Detroit-only remedies.[60]

The mere possibility of a metropolitan school desegregation order inflamed suburban resistance to SEMCOG, seemingly confirming the consolidation fears that Grosse Pointe

[57] Richard David Riddle, "The Rise of the Reagan Democrats in Warren, Michigan," 66. During the meeting, Romney referred to his own advocacy of open housing in wealthy Birmingham as Governor, prompting Warren Councilwoman Lillian Klimecki Dannis to retort: "And can you tell us how many non-whites moved into Birmingham through your efforts?"

[58] For a detailed account of the 1970 housing controversy, see Richard David Riddle, "The Rise of the Reagan Democrats in Warren, Michigan (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1998), 41-103.

[59] Jerry M. Flint, "U.S. Judge Orders Desegregation of All Schools in Pontiac, Mich.," *New York Times,* February 18, 1970, A-26.

[60] See the discussion in Richard David Riddle, "The Rise of the Reagan Democrats in Warren, Michigan," 194-208. According to Riddle, Ritchie had come to genuinely support metropolitan-wide busing, although his clients generally believed that a metropolitan-wide remedy would be the most effective way to defeat the busing order, by ensuring that suburban residents rallied to their cause.

residents had expressed four years earlier. Save Our Children, a Warren-based anti-busing group, seized on a League of Women Voters questionnaire in which several candidates for local office had expressed support for joining SEMCOG. Save Our Children equated that position with opposing "local control of our schools and local government."[61]

Figure 3.4. SEMCOG's emissary to the suburbs: Mel Ravitz greets Downriver officials at a January 1971 meeting of the Lincoln Park Kiwanis Club, January 1971. Pictured are Ecorse Mayor Richard Manning; Allen Park Councilman Frank Lada; Ravitz; Southgate Mayor Robert Reaume; Trenton Mayor Clarence J. Hanlon; Lincoln Park Kiwanis Vice-President Douglas Gourlay; and Lincoln Park Councilman Max Schiebold. At the time, Allen Park, Lincoln Park and Trenton were SEMCOG members; Ecorse and Southgate were not. "Ravitz Says Cities Should Be United Behind SEMCOG," *The Lincoln Parker*, January 27, 1971, 2-A, in MRP, Box 60, Folder 14.

Mel Ravitz was elected chair of SEMCOG in January of 1970. In a way his charge at SEMCOG resembled his task in the Mack-Concord conservation area a decade earlier. As a Detroit city planner, Ravitz had labored to convince residents of the neighborhood to stay in place, even as black residents moved in. Now, Councilman Ravitz attempted to stem the wave of suburban jurisdictions exiting the metropolitan organization, despite their fear of association with

[61] Riddle, "The Rise of the Reagan Democrats in Warren, Michigan," 208.

the increasingly black central city.[62] Like Turner, Ravitz made the case for SEMCOG membership by forcefully rejecting the idea that SEMCOG should become an autonomous layer of government. Ravitz had been elected to City Council as an advocate of regional cooperation, and he once viewed metropolitan government as "inevitable." Over his term as SEMCOG chair, however, Ravitz hit the lecture circuit to reassure audiences that the organization's goal was to serve local governments, not the other way around. SEMCOG, he told the Detroit Economic Club, "seeks merely to assist local governments [to] do their thing better."[63] Ravitz assured the League of Women Voters of the Plymouth-Northville area that the Council of Governments "provides the greatest possible protection to local governments without threatening their autonomy."[64] In a January 1971 address to mayors of the Downriver suburbs, Ravitz stressed SEMCOG's practical utility in coordinating region-wide planning for solid waste disposal, drug abuse prevention, and environmental protection. He also emphasized the cost savings SEMCOG membership provided for local governments.[65]

Ravitz suggested the political rationale behind this strategy in a blistering 1970 lecture on "Major Routes to Regionalism" at the University of Michigan's Dearborn campus. Ravitz spoke harshly of those who continued to press for stronger metropolitan government with no regard for political realities:

> The blunt fact is that metropolitan or regional government is a figment of the academic mind… [M]etropolitan government does not exist in the United States because no one but its academic advocates want it. And they want it because in their abstract world it seems to meet the arbitrary requirements of being rational, of being more efficient, of being more economical. But even if it possessed all these virtues, which it doesn't, it is destined to remain untried because the people of our urban areas don't want it.
>
> The professors of political science and the professional promoters of faddish concepts would have us believe that metropolitan government is a sound concept that hasn't yet been tried because the people of the regions just haven't understood what it was all about. They blame the failure of metropolitan government to find its way into practical existence on the ignorance of the people. They are mistaken. Metropolitan government, whether in its unadulterated state or

[62] Indeed, given Warren's large Italian-American population, it is possible that some of the residents of that suburb were the children of residents who Ravitz had worked with in the Mack-Concord area twenty years earlier.
[63] Mel Ravitz, "A federation of local governments," *The COG Camera*, 2, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, June 1970, in MRP, Box 60, Folder 13.
[64] "SEMCOG: Service, Not Metro—Ravitz," *The Garden City Observer*, April 23, 1970, in MRP, Box 60, Folder 13.
[65] "Ravitz Says Cities Should Be United Behind SEMCOG," *The Lincoln Parker*, January 27, 1971, 2-A.

> in the two level form, or in any other variation, hasn't been adopted by the people of the United States' urban regions, not because they don't understand it, but because they do. It really doesn't require great sophistication for people to recognize that the price they would pay for the presumed increase in rationality, efficiency and economy would be loss of their local power. They have understood that plain and simple, and they have turned away from metropolitan government almost universally.
>
> Merely examine the interest of the people of the urban region, and we can appreciate the vehemence of the opposition. Only those who are removed from the everyday realities of power and politics could make the mistake of proposing a new governmental layer as part of the answer to the problems of these regions.
>
> Neither the majority of the residents of the white, middle class suburbs, nor the majority of the black residents of central cities wants a new governmental echelon interposed that will reduce their respective authority over their present jurisdictions.[66]

The growing racial divide between city and suburbs made metropolitan government a fool's errand.

Indeed, Ravitz soon decided that political reality also made it impossible for SEMCOG to meaningfully address that divide, at least in the short term. Ravitz's convictions on the subject had not changed. In his 1971 State of the Region address to the annual General Assembly at Cobo Hall, he issued a grim warning that "separatism…spells ultimate disaster for all parts of the region," citing Martin Niemoller's famous words regarding the absence of solidarity under Nazism. "The point should be clear to all," Ravitz said. "Either we concern ourselves now with the plight of every part of the region or we reconcile ourselves to piecemeal deterioration." Although Ravitz noted that about a dozen older suburbs had lost population over the previous decade, there could be little doubt that Detroit's plight was foremost in his mind.[67]

Yet while Ravitz affirmed the need for metropolitan cooperation, he also rejected the idea that SEMCOG could directly address the metropolitan racial dilemma. In a fall 1971 letter to Ravitz, Interfaith Action Council president Albert Dunmore had pointed out that every aspect of SEMCOG's work program could be approached from a racial justice perspective. With respect to rapid transit, for example, would a new system "only provide the means for more suburban

[66] Mel Ravitz, "Major Routes to Regionalism," lecture at University of Michigan-Dearborn, October 23, 1970, in MRP, Box 69, Folder 16.
[67] "In Germany they first came for the communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist…" Mel Ravitz, "State of the Region Address," January 30, 1971, in MRP, Box 69, Folder 18.

whites to have greater access to inner city jobs?" With respect to water and sewer infrastructure, "[w]ho is paying for excess capacity, and who is benefiting?"[68]

Ravitz replied that SEMCOG's youth and organizational fragility precluded attempts to tackle racial inequality:

> SEMCOG cannot yet be a forum for the taking of positions on deeply held controversial issues. We have had two attempts at doing so, with disasterous [sic] results both times…
>
> SEMCOG must grow into power through usefulness to the governments of the region. To fault SEMCOG for not solving the immense social and political and economic problems of southeastern Michigan is not constructive given its structure, youth and basis of support.[69]

Only three years earlier, Ravitz had said that SEMCOG must directly confront "social issues"—most of all racial inequality—or risk irrelevance. As chair, however, he had come to decide that to do so would be to risk the organization's survival.

In fact, the fiscal condition of SEMCOG was dire. Detroit Edison chief Walker Cisler had personally loaned the organization $50,000 in anticipation of further corporate funding, but that support proved elusive. In January of 1972, E. Robert Turner wrote a desperate letter to General Motors Vice-President O.A. Lundin, pleading for General Motors President Edward Cole to make good on his previous commitment to lead a fundraising drive: "I recognize that you are an extremely busy person," he wrote, "and that SEMCOG's problems are not very high on your priority scale…I submit, however, that this was an obligation that Mr. Cole agreed to take on, and that it would be disasterous [sic] for us at this late date if you now ignore our situation or fail to make any effort on our behalf."[70] Turner quit not long afterwards, taking a job as city manager of Cincinnati.[71]

Through overtures to the suburbs, pleas to the corporate elite, and renunciation of redistributive goals, SEMCOG warded off a wholesale stampede out of the organization and gained a few new members, such as the city of Pontiac, which joined in 1970, and Livingston

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[68] Albert J. Dunmore letter to Mel Ravitz, September 29, 1971, in MRP, Box 60, Folder 16.
[69] Mel Ravitz, letter to Albert Dunmore, October 4, 1971, in Mel Ravitz Papers, Box 60, Folder 16. One of these issues was "Parochiaid," or the question of state aid to (largely Catholic) parochial schools—an issue closely linked to white flight from the Detroit Public Schools. The other issue Ravitz refers to is unclear.
[70] E. Robert Turner, letter to O.A. Lundin, January 31, 1972, in MRP, Box 60, Folder 17.
[71] "Mortgage Bankers Meet," *Detroit Free Press*, April 15, 1972, 1-B. Turner gave an address at the meeting titled "Voluntary Regionalization: Will It Survive in the Detroit Metropolitan Area?"

County, in 1972. [72] Ravitz's efforts, in concert with those of longtime Macomb County Board of Supervisors member and former SICC chair Bernard Kalahar, even convinced Macomb to join on a trial basis in 1971. Kalahar reminded readers of the *Macomb Daily* that SICC had helped secure representation for the county on the Detroit Water Board and ensured the extension of the water lines that made Macomb's growth possible. Participation in metropolitan institutions, he argued, was in the interests of suburban counties.[73]

In the long run, however, Kalahar's historical anecdote did not count for much in the vastly different political context of the 1970s, when the word "metropolitan" immediately called up the threat of desegregation. The continued furor over city-suburb busing in Macomb ensured the county's tenure in SEMCOG would be short. In February 1972, the Macomb County Board of Commissioners voted 18-1 to quit. Commissioner Robert VerKuilen of Warren led the opposition; his colleague Dennis Dutko, also of Warren, described SEMCOG as "the wrong group, interested in the wrong kind of problems at the wrong time." The vote was cheered on by dozens of members of anti-busing groups, including Irene McCabe's National Action Group and Warren-based Save Our Children, which "linked SEMCOG with metropolitan wide school integration plans."[74]

SEMCOG survived the defection, but its survival had come at a cost. "If I've learned anything in four years," Ravitz told journalists in January 1972, at the close of his two years as chair, "it's the limits of SEMCOG. It cannot even take a stand on a highly controversial issue," he said. "If it does, it blows itself out of the water." SEMCOG's main accomplishment, he stated, was that it had managed to survive at all.[75]

Self-Determination and the City

In 1971, the Metropolitan Fund had begun work on a new project it called the *Regionalist Papers.* Kent Mathewson had grown increasingly frustrated with SEMCOG's struggles, less than four years after its birth. After more than a decade of preaching the blessings of voluntary

[72] "Pontiac to Join SEMCOG," *Detroit Free Press,* September 10, 1970, 14-A; "Livingston County Joins SEMCOG," *Detroit Free Press,* February 17, 1972, 6-B.
[73] Bernard Kalahar, "SEMCOG Affiliation Would Aid Macomb," *Macomb Daily* [undated; January 1971?], in MRP, Box 60, Folder 14.
[74] Sue Fleming, "Macomb Membership in 3-County [sic] Group Ends," *Macomb Daily,* February 15, 1972.
[75] Michael Maidenberg, "Local Jealousy Hurting—Ravitz," *Detroit Free Press,* January 26, 1972, 14C.

regional cooperation, he was convinced that only a more powerful framework of unified regional government could overcome the limitations of the council of governments model that he had pioneered in Salem and then helped to institute in Detroit.

Mathewson was aware that proposals to strengthen metropolitan government would draw opposition not only from suburban jurisdictions, but from the growing class of black elected officials in central cities. In 1966, Detroit activists James and Grace Lee Boggs had discussed the potential for municipal government as the basis for black power in America in an article entitled "The City is the Black Man's Land;[76] the following year, Carl Stokes and Richard Hatcher had been elected the first black mayors of Cleveland, Ohio and Gary, Indiana. As more central cities gained black majorities, it seemed clear that others would follow in Stokes and Hatcher's footsteps, and as Mel Ravitz had warned, many black activists suspected that metropolitan institutions could function as new "containment structures" limiting black control.

The most widely shared articulation of that view came in a 1967 series of articles in the *New Republic* by the leftist sociologists Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward. They warned that federal mandates for metropolitan coordination were undermining local government autonomy and black political power, in what they called a deliberate strategy by the Democratic political leadership to preserve its metropolitan majority against defectors from city and suburbs alike.[77] In some respects, Piven and Cloward echoed longstanding conservative critiques of metropolitan government, viewing further centralization as furthering a technocratic and ultimately undemocratic mode of governance. "As the business of government comes to be carried on by a coalition of federal, metropolitan and local bureaucracies in the language of expertise," they wrote, "local groups and elected officials will become puzzled outsiders, lacking the specialized knowledge to perceive and articulate their interests." Although Piven and Cloward viewed the advance of metropolitan government as inevitable, they counseled black

[76] James and Grace Lee Boggs, "The City is the Black Man's Land," *Monthly Review* 17.11 (1966), 35-46. The Boggses admitted that the revolution they sought would not "be accomplished simply on a citywide basis, i.e., without defeating the national power structure," but asserted that "by establishing beachheads in one or more major cities, black revolutionary governments would be in the most strategic position to contend with and eventually defeat this national power structure."

[77] Frances Fox Piven & Richard A. Cloward, "Black Control of Cities: Heading It Off by Metropolitan Government," *The New Republic*, September 30, 1967, 19-21.

officials to resist surrendering municipal authority and to bargain for proportional representation and veto power in metropolitan decision-making.[78]

Mathewson rejected that view. In a 1970 speech to the National Municipal League, titled "Our Leftover Cities," he described himself as "somewhat mystified by this growing concern with black leadership about the regional thrust." Since the era of slavery, he observed, blacks had had to make do with the cast-off and unwanted goods of the white majority: clothing, housing, even food, such as chitlins and other marginal meats. "Now is the time," Mathewson argued, "for black leadership…to refuse to accept inferior, worn out left-over cities…What does it profit the black citizens of Detroit to inherit a bankrupt city?" He described Piven and Cloward's argument as "a dangerous cop out. There is no possible way that the major central cities of this nation can reverse the process of physical and fiscal blight unilaterally. They cannot tax their own citizens enough, nor withdraw sufficient services, to balance the budget."[79] Mathewson even urged the "transfer of the traditional mantle of leadership from the central city mayor to the chairman of SEMCOG"—notwithstanding the fact that unlike the mayor of Detroit, the chair of SEMCOG was not elected to that position by constituents and had little formal authority.[80]

Notwithstanding SEMCOG's struggles to gain support for a limited form of metropolitan planning and governance, the Metropolitan Fund moved forward with a new project, dubbed the *Regionalist Papers*, that aimed to significantly strengthen the organization. The Fund's Regional Governance Policy Committee commissioned twelve papers on topics in regional governance and organized panel discussions of each one at colleges and universities across the metropolitan area. The discussions did not yield much resembling a consensus. That of Paper Number Eight, for example, an essay on "Regional Governance and Racial and Ethnic Minorities" by Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley, prompted heated debate over the implications of regional government for black Detroiters. Some panelists sided with Bradley, who argued that while

[78] Frances Fox Piven & Richard A. Cloward, "Black Control of Cities—II: How the Negroes Will Lose," *The New Republic*, October 7, 1967, 15-19. Piven and Cloward acknowledged that "local populism has generally yielded much harsher policies toward the poor and minorities than those of the federal government," but hoped that the new black majorities in central cities would usher in a new era of progressive policy. While city governments had previously served big business and the wealthy, Piven and Cloward argued that "[a] municipality controlled by blacks is far less likely to protect these property interests" (17). Notably, Piven and Cloward had already concluded that white resistance made metropolitan housing desegregation a fool's errand. In a 1966 article, they had urged reformers to focus on improving ghetto housing instead. Frances Fox Piven & Richard A. Cloward, "Desegregated Housing: Who Pays for the Reformers' Ideal?" *The New Republic*, December 17, 1966, 17-22.
[79] Kent Mathewson, "Our Leftover Cities," speech to National Municipal League, Portland, OR, August 17, 1970, MRP, Box 59, Folder 15.
[80] Kent Mathewson, "Our Leftover Cities," MRP, Box 59, Folder 15.

black elected officials should work to promote their interests within regional government rather than rejecting it wholesale.[81] Others, like Nelson "Jack" Edwards, one of the highest-ranking black officials in the UAW, argued that "[i]f you go to a regional government, you'll be lost in the sands of the beach. I don't agree that we've had our day and we had better get on our knees."[82]

Not long afterwards, in November 1973, the stakes of that debate increased as Detroit elected Coleman Young as its first black mayor. The candidates thought to be the front-runners at the outset of the campaign were white: Police Commissioner John Nichols, the hard-line "law-and-order" candidate, and Mel Ravitz, representing the liberal black-white coalition that had elected Cavanagh. Young, the *Detroit Free Press* wrote, "got a late start and has not yet caught fire."[83] Yet it was Ravitz who failed to make it past the September primary. Despite endorsements from the United Auto Workers and other elements of the liberal establishment, and more biracial support than any other candidate, he polled only 18% of the vote. As the *Free Press* put it, "Ravitz appealed to voters everywhere, but not enough anywhere."[84] Ultimately, "he appeared to have been defeated by the same racial divisions that he had worked for years to break down."[85] Young then defied predictions to defeat Nichols and win election as Detroit's first black mayor, less than two decades after the arch-segregationist Cobo had died in office, in a vote that divided almost entirely along racial lines. The *Detroit News* estimated that Nichols received 91 percent of the white vote and Young received 92 percent of the black vote. In previous years, the *News* observed, that split would have delivered the mayor's office to Nichols, but white flight and increased black voter registration had given the edge to Young.[86]

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[81] Bradley cited Mathewson's speech on 'Leftover' Cities" and N. Paul Friesema's article on "The Hollow Prize," warning: "There is the spectre of minorities reigning over what is essentially a future ash heap, and that, in my judgment, is no great joy for anyone." Kent Mathewson, ed., *The Regionalist Papers* (Detroit, MI: Metropolitan Fund, 1974), 163-4.

[82] Mathewson, *Regionalist Papers,* 174, 176.

[83] "In Detroit Mayoral Primary, John Mogk's Our Choice," *Detroit Free Press,* August 30, 1973, 8-A.

[84] William Mitchell, "Biracial Appeal is Key to Victory," *Detroit Free Press,* September 23, 1973. Ravitz earned his largest margins in majority-black districts. Another candidate, Wayne State law professor John Mogk, also functioned as a spoiler, siphoning off votes that might otherwise have gone towards Ravitz.

[85] Peter Benjaminson, "Ravitz Loses in Neighborhoods He Cultivated," *Detroit Free Press,* September 12, 1973, 10-A.

[86] Robert L. Pisor, "Strength of black vote gave Young his historic victory," *Detroit News,* November 7, 1973, 1A.

Figure 3.5. Detroit mayoral candidates debate, 1973. Coleman A. Young is standing, Mel Ravitz is at right. Virtual Motor City Collection, Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs.

Many suburban leaders, even those sympathetic to SEMCOG, also deemed metropolitan government a political impossibility. Taylor Mayor Richard Trolley suggested that the cross-district busing issue had set back the regionalist cause by five to ten years: "If local governments were concerned before with losing some of their local control, they're doubly concerned

today."[87] Richard Miller, publisher of the *Royal Oak Daily Tribune*, surely remembered how the SEMCOG issue had affected Royal Oak elections five years earlier; he described the idea of regionalism in the suburbs as "dynamite."[88]

Review of the *Regionalist Papers* went before the Fund's Regional Governance Policy Committee—a group that included eight representatives of private businesses, including Joseph Hudson and Max Fisher, and just two local elected officials, Wayne County Board of Commissioners chair Robert E. Fitzpatrick and Pontiac councilman Charles M. Tucker. Tucker was one of the body's three black members, who also included Judge Wade McCree and Reginald Wilson, president of Wayne County Community College.[89] In a vote reviewed at the committee's January 1974 meeting, the group overwhelmingly supported the formation of a non-voluntary, financially independent regional agency that would address issues of both social and physical planning.[90] The Committee recommended to the Michigan Legislature a two-stage process for implementing regional government in the SEMCOG region. The first stage would reconstitute the General Assembly of SEMCOG as a 41-member body, composed of directly elected representatives as well as local government officials: it would include 10 elected by the County Boards of Commissioners, 10 by the mayors and township supervisors of the municipal governments, 20 elected by the public on a district basis, and one Chairman elected at large. Over the course of three years, the reconstituted SEMCOG would conduct a regional charter study to recommend a permanent system of regional governance.[91]

Responses to the proposal by the larger board of the Metropolitan Fund indicated a widening divide between the region's corporate leaders, who largely endorsed the recommendations, and its elected officials, who did not. Michigan Secretary of State Richard Austin, still the most prominent black member of the board, stated that he was "not prepared to accept metropolitan government." He further warned that SEMCOG was the wrong body to study the question of regional organization and "would be damaged irreparably in the process." Wayne County Board of Commissioners Chair Robert Fitzpatrick stressed the need for elected

[87] Mathewson, *Regionalist Papers*, 83.
[88] Mathewson, *Regionalist Papers,* 255.
[89] Mathewson, *Regionalist Papers,* 7.
[90] Mathewson, *Regionalist Papers,* 26-31.
[91] Mathewson, *Regionalist Papers,* 8.

county executives instead. "The creation of a new level of government is unnecessary and undesirable," wrote SEMCOG chair James P. Grannan.[92]

If Kent Mathewson had doubts about pressing ahead with the project, he did not reveal them in his foreword to the *Regionalist Papers,* published in a handsome bound edition in April of 1974. Mathewson's forward acknowledged his own share of the "responsibility for creation of the COG institution," and found that institution wanting. Voluntary councils of government, he argued, had the same weaknesses as the early United States under the Articles of Confederation. Metropolitan areas required a stronger constitution to address the social and environmental ills that an "excess of democracy" entailed.

> Presently the urban condition of the metropolitan regions of our nation is critical. The urban condition of Southeast Michigan, for example, is characterized by nearly one thousand murders in the year 1973…with more than seven hundred in a single jurisdiction; by distressingly high unemployment, seemingly endemic, particularly in certain groups and locales; by inefficient use of energy due to ineffective or non-existent planning; by public transportation inadequate or unavailable at a time of great need; and by spread-city continuing unabated because of a most profligate use of land.[93]

Mathewson acknowledged that regional government was no panacea, yet he observed that "authors of the Federalist Papers promised no miracle from a federated union but saw no alternative but to try." Alexander Hamilton, he pointed out, had initially been outnumbered two to one by "localist" delegates at the New York convention to ratify the Constitution. "The odds, actors, and arguments seem much the same today," Mathewson admitted.[94]

The man who took up the cause of the *Regionalist Papers* in the Michigan state capitol could hardly have been more different from the flamboyant Hamilton. William Ryan, a white state legislator from Detroit's East Side, was described as journalists as "a rumpled, drab-looking man" with "zero charisma," perhaps "the most unprepossessing politician in Michigan's history."[95] Despite appearances, however, Ryan was a gifted politician, elected president of his union local at Zenith Carburetor at the age of 23. He also held strong ethical commitments influenced by Catholic social teaching,[96] and his advocacy of open housing legislation had

[92] Mathewson, *Rergionalist Papers,* 36-38.
[93] Mathewson, *Regionalist Papers,* 4.
[94] Mathewson, *Regionalist Papers,* 4.
[95] Barbara Adams, "The Unprepossessing Mr. Ryan: Understanding Exemplary Legislative Leadership" (doctoral dissertation, Western Michigan University, 1994), 8, 263.
[96] Adams, "The Unprepossessing Mr. Ryan," 266-7.

angered many of his Democratic colleagues.[97] Ryan's metropolitan government proposal followed the recommendations of the *Regionalist Papers*, replacing SEMCOG with a 41-member Southeast Michigan Planning and Development Agency that would prepare further recommendations to the Legislature after a three-year study.[98] Like Mathewson, Ryan viewed SEMCOG's semi-voluntary structure as hopelessly weak, given the scale of the problems the region confronted. "[W]hat kind of government can work with the understanding that you don't have to belong and you don't have to obey their decisions?" he asked.[99]

The *Regionalist Papers* and Ryan's bill brought an avalanche of criticism from suburban elected officials. Robert Huber of Troy, now serving in Congress, connected the *Papers* to Judge Roth's metropolitan busing order. "There can be no opposition to cross-district busing if you eliminate all boundaries," he warned, calling for an emergency "Committee to Protect Local Government and Schools."[100] The Macomb County Commission moved to place an "advisory referendum" on regional government on the November ballot. "This is the baby that brought this up," said Commissioner Willard D. Back, brandishing a copy of the *Regionalist Papers*. "If this goes into legislation or executive order, then it will be too late to pose any questions."[101] Oakland County Commissioner Lawrence Pernick, chairman of SEMCOG's county bloc, described the Metropolitan Fund as "basically a handful of people with big money behind them who would rather deal with a couple of regional officials than have to go from community to community to take care of their problem."[102]

It was not just suburban elected officials who opposed the proposal, however. The new generation of black elected officials in Detroit joined in the chorus of opposition, although for different reasons. "The one effective tool that we have to fight for justice for poor people is the political power of our city," argued Detroit Common Council's Erma Henderson, charging that Ryan's proposal would amount to "formally establishing a black ghetto without political power," and pointing out that the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority "consistently ignores our need

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[97] Adams, "The Unprepossessing Mr. Ryan," 189.
[98] Fred Girard, "City, Suburbs Fear Unity Plan," *Detroit Free Press,* December 28, 1975.
[99] William Dunn, "SEMCOG, its creator at odds," *Detroit News,* December 28, 1976, 10A.
[100] Jim Schutze, *Detroit Free Press,* April 28, 1974, 16-F.
[101] Robert Selwa, "'Lansing message' proposed by board," *Macomb Daily* [undated], in SEMCOG Papers, Box 38, Folder 11. The referendum was ultimately taken off the ballot after SEMCOG protested that the wording of the proposal inaccurately described SEMCOG as an example of "regional government." Marilyn Maloney, "Board kills SEMCOG issue," *Macomb Daily,* Sept. 10, 1974.
[102] Jim Schutze, *Detroit Free Press,* April 28, 1974, 16-F.

for a viable recreation program in this area."[103] Congressman John Conyers said he wanted Ryan's bill withdrawn, and called out the hypocrisy of suburbanites who favored regionalism as long as it did not encroach on segregation: "I know we hear calls to regionalize water service, or waste disposal, or transportation. But we never hear calls to regionalize school districts, do we? No, we spend millions of dollars in litigation over the matter…And we never hear calls to regionalize public housing, the matter that makes all the litigation necessary in the first place." Indeed, in July 1974, three months after the release of the *Regionalist Papers* and seven years after the 1967 Detroit rebellion, the U.S. Supreme Court had struck down Judge Roth's metropolitan busing plan, a momentous blow to school desegregation. "It may seem the easier course to allow our great metropolitan areas to be divided up into two cities—one white, the other black," Justice Thurgood Marshall wrote in his dissent, "but it is a course, I predict, our people will ultimately regret."[104]

It was Mayor Young's opinion that counted the most among black elected officials, of course. A 1975 staff memorandum to the Mayor warned that regional initiatives would "DISSIPATE THE POWER OF THE MAYOR AND THE CITY OF DETROIT WITHIN THE SEVEN (7) COUNTY REGION" and recommended he take steps to counter SEMCOG by forming an alternative organization focused on the region's mayors, much as Mayor Cobo had considered building a municipal alternative to SICC 15 years earlier.[105] "I want to go on record," Young said later that year, "as saying I am now and always have been a firm advocate of regional cooperation. But I'm no more ready to give up the autonomy and independence of the City of Detroit than Mayor Hubbard is to give up the autonomy and independence of the City of Dearborn."[106]

The racial and political polarization between Detroit and the suburbs had made proposals for metropolitan governance anathema in virtually all quarters, except among the generation of executives who served on the board of the Metropolitan Fund, whose support was not a selling point for everyone. The *Regionalist Papers* even received a write-up in the *Ann Arbor Sun*, the

[103] Erma Henderson, "The Rules of the Game," *The Sun,* December 3, 1975.
[104] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 487.
[105] "Staff Report to Mayor on Regionalism," February 17, 1975, in CYP, Box 65, Folder 20. Why suburban mayors would choose to align with Young rather than SEMCOG was not explained.
[106] Fred Girard, "City, Suburbs Fear Unity Plan," *Detroit Free Press*, December 28, 1975, 1A.

newspaper of counterculture leader John Sinclair's White Panther Party, under the headline "Big

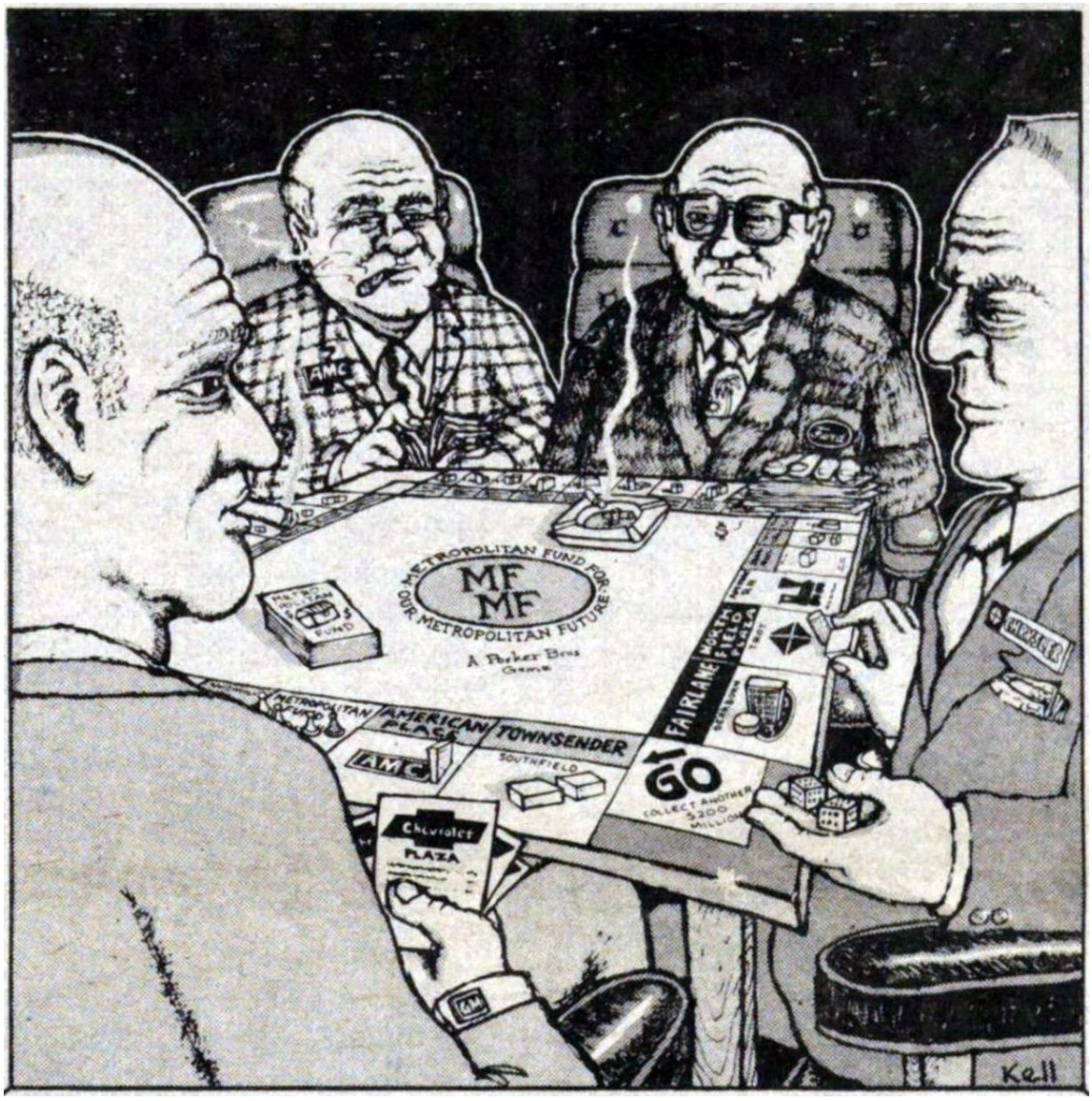

Figure 3.6. The *Ann Arbor Sun* was unconvinced by the *Regionalist Papers'* arguments for regional governance, as suggested by this cartoon it published of auto executives seated around a Metropolitan Fund monopoly board. *Ann Arbor Sun*, October 15, 1975, 5, AADL.

3 & Friends Plot 'Regional' Empire." The *Regionalist Papers*, the *Sun* announced, comprised "a sophisticated scheme to legally take over political control of the Detroit metropolitan area," wrapped in a "Bicentennial red-white-and-blue package" and "couched in the facile language of 'progressive liberalism.'" An accompanying illustration portrayed the cigar-chomping executives

of GM, Ford, Chrysler and AMC sitting around a Metropolitan Fund Monopoly board.[107] Thirteen years earlier, the Port Huron Statement had endorsed metropolitan governance as a means to check private power, but that had been in a different era, when the student left in Ann Arbor and elsewhere was still more likely to use "liberal" as a term of praise than an epithet.

In a roundabout way, the *Regionalist Papers* and the Ryan bill did succeed in strengthening SEMCOG: by uniting its member governments against their proposals. Immediately following the release of the *Regionalist Papers*, SEMCOG adopted a resolution opposing regional government and requesting its members to "formalize their opposition by resolutions sent to the Michigan Legislature."[108] SEMCOG's 1976 Annual Report stressed the organization's nature "as a *voluntary* Council…where communities can take stands on current issues—crucial issues, such as the continuing support of voluntary regional cooperation rather than regional government." SEMCOG's stand against regional government, it argued, was an important reason why many cities had decided to rejoin the organization.[109] After almost ten years of upheaval, metropolitan Detroit's regional governance body had found its voice: as a champion of local control.

At a 1976 board meeting of the Metropolitan Fund, Kent Mathewson excused himself after feeling a sharp pain in his chest. When Joseph Hudson found him in an anteroom, the sixty-year-old Mathewson was pale and perspiring. Hudson helped Mathewson down to his personal limousine and ordered the chauffeur to rush them to Henry Ford Hospital. Thirteen years after arriving in Detroit, the man the region's leaders had hoped might bring "massive cooperation" to bear on their metropolitan problem had suffered a massive heart attack.

After his discharge from the hospital, Mathewson settled into an extended convalescence in the basement of his home on Chablis Street. To provide more opportunities for exercise, he began spending the winters in San Diego. When Metro, the new regional government in Portland, Oregon, celebrated its inauguration, its leaders invited Mathewson as a speaker; his wife Mariana kept her hand on his wrist throughout the speech, checking his pulse. Mathewson

[107] Maureen McDonald and Derek VanPelt, "Big 3 & Friends Plot 'Regional' Empire," *Ann Arbor Sun*, October 15, 1975, 1, 5.
[108] SEMCOG news release, April 29, 1974, in SP, Box 38, Folder 11.
[109] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, "1976 Annual Report," 4.

began teaching courses in city management and urban planning, using the *Regionalist Papers* as a textbook. In 1979, he formally retired from the Metropolitan Fund.[110]

SEMCOG, too, had survived. Yet the organization Mathewson had helped bring into being was also bound for a lengthy recuperation. In the bitter contests over metropolitan segregation and inequality, as suburban whites showed themselves unwilling to concede racial and spatial privilege, and black elected officials cast their lot with political power in the central city, the very possibility of regional cooperation for the common good had been largely discredited. As liberalism waned, there would be no resolution to the metropolitan dilemma, which a growing number of regional leaders had come to believe was no problem at all.

[110] Lynn W. Hall, *Kent Mathewson: Keeper of the Flame* (self-published, 2001), 156-160.

Chapter 4: Sprawl, Schmall

Five years into the administration of Mayor Coleman Young, a week before Christmas of 1978, longtime City of Detroit Human Rights Department staffer Jim Bush typed out an urgently worded memorandum on a subject he had considered for some time: "Disinvestment & Controlling Sprawl." "Enclosed is a paper I prepared for the Detroit Community College Consortium," he wrote William Cilluffo, one of Mayor Young's delegates to SEMCOG. "I hope it meets with your approval or even has some value."

Bush explained that he sat on the board of the East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC), a citizen group founded several years earlier during the burst of ecological activism that followed the first Earth Day in 1970. In that capacity Bush served as an alternate to SEMCOG's Council on Regional Development and enjoyed a close-up perspective on the regional planning process. "Recently," he wrote Cilluffo, "I found myself all alone in raising questions about the widening of M-59 west of Pontiac—a position based on EMEAC's opposition to M-275 and increasing traffic in NW Oakland County."

The environmentalists' challenge to suburban highway expansion was also of vital interest to the City of Detroit, Bush argued, and City leadership ought to leverage its role at SEMCOG to join the fight. New development at the suburban fringe, supported by public subsidies for highway and sewer extensions, was sapping the population and resources of Detroit and older suburbs as well. Bush cited Wayne State University economics professor Wilbur Thompson, who had described the metropolitan housing market as a "'zero sum growth' situation where the pluses of suburban construction must be balanced by deletions from the housing stock in Detroit." Each year, the City of Detroit was already demolishing roughly six thousand abandoned or dilapidated homes, even as developers threw up new subdivisions beyond the city limits.

To demonstrate the role of public infrastructure subsidies in the process, Bush mapped out the location of the prior two years' "Idea Homes," the model units homebuilders used to

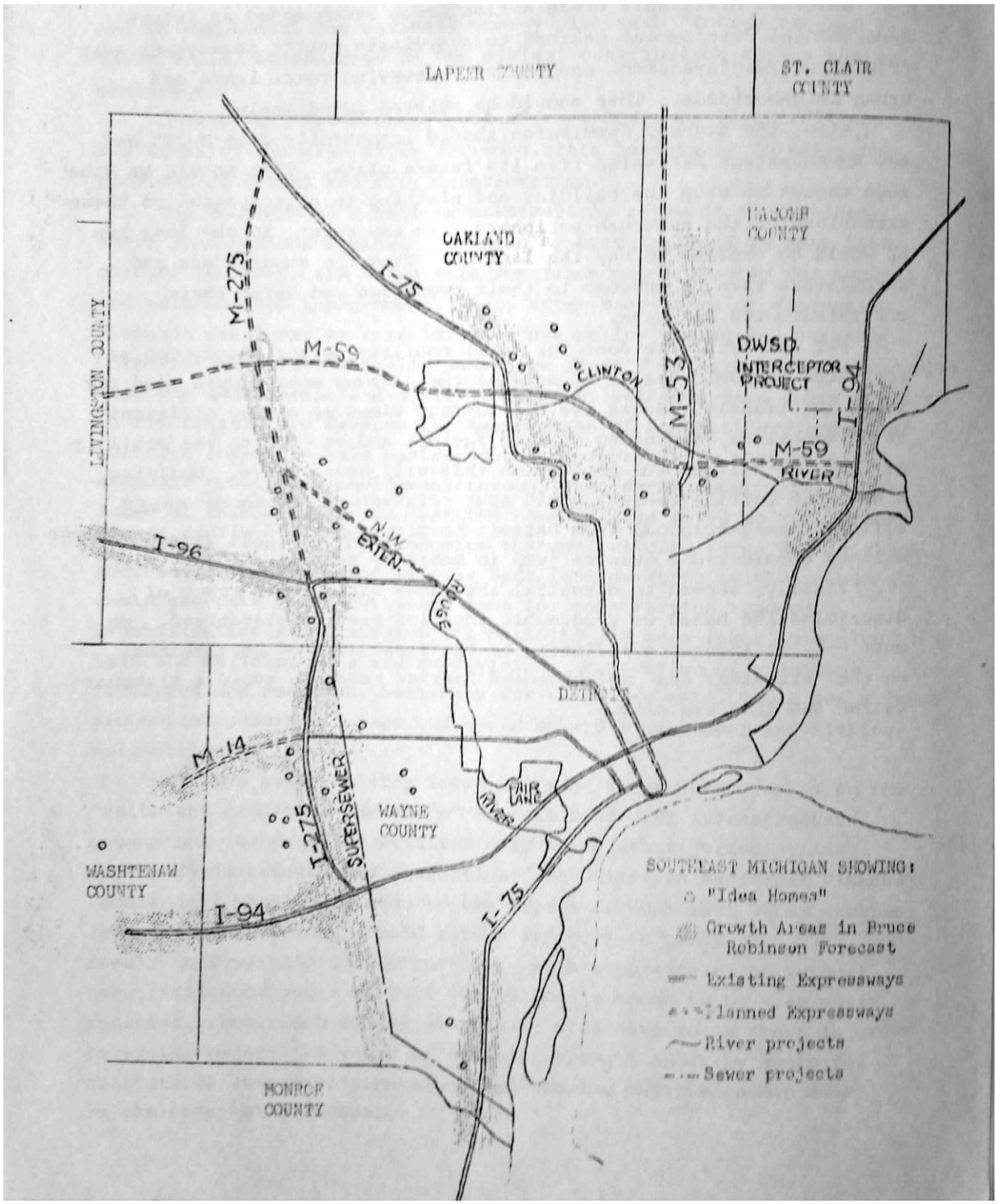

Figure 4.1. In 1978, 10 years after SEMCOG's founding, environmental activist and Detroit Department of Human Rights staffer Jim Bush sketched this map of Southeast Michigan, showing how highway and sewer investments were continuing to further suburbanization and urban decline. James Bush, "Disinvestment & Controlling Sprawl' [memorandum to William Cilluffo], December 18, 1978, in CYP, Box 120, Folder 17.

market their subdivisions. “Of the 45 ‘Idea Homes’ of the past two years, none was within 15 miles of downtown Detroit,” Bush wrote. Almost all of them were located along the interstates and state highways at the metropolitan fringe, where a new series of massive road construction proposals
threatened to extend the region’s sprawl even further. It was high time, Bush argued, that activists for racial justice and environmental protection made common cause in their campaigns against redlining and disinvestment in central cities and what Bush called the “greenlining” of farmlands and wetlands for development.[1] “The City needs to strengthen its efforts to bring regional infrastructure extensions under rational controls,” Bush urged. He recommended that the Mayor’s Office join the fight for land use legislation at the state level and flex its muscle in SEMCOG—in coalition with the older suburbs beginning to experience similar disinvestment and the environmentalists battling new development at the metropolitan fringe.[2]

Bush was not the only individual in the Seventies to call for a grand coalition for metropolitan development reform, uniting city leaders, older suburbs, and suburban environmentalists in an effort to stop sprawl and disinvestment in central cities. In his memorandum, he cited a planned joint conference of the national Sierra Club and the Urban League as an example of progress towards that end.[3] Yet in metropolitan Detroit, and most other places around the nation, this coalition never got off the ground. At the start of the decade, as the environmental movement flowered across the nation, some heralded the advent of a “quiet revolution” in land management. With a handful of exceptions, however—most notably the case of Oregon, where environmentalists and farmers joined with city leaders to secure the nation’s strongest land use planning legislation—American metropolitan areas continued to sprawl outward.[4]

In principle, metropolitan planning organizations like SEMCOG could have provided a locus for coalition-building against sprawl. Bush had sketched the possibility of a metropolitan majority coalition for that purpose, encompassing central city leaders, older suburbs, and

[1] Jim Bush, “Disinvestment & Controlling Sprawl’ [memorandum to William Cilluffo], December 18, 1978, in CYP, Box 120, Folder 17.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] For an insightful comparative study of metropolitan reform proposals in four states, see Margaret Weir, “Coalition Building for Regionalism,” in Bruce Katz, ed., *Reflections on Regionalism* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2000), 127-153.

exurban environmentalists.[5] Indeed, after an extended recovery from the turbulent 1970s, SEMCOG staff made an effort to foster such a coalition through the Regional Development Initiative of 1990-1992, a scenario planning process documenting the costs of sprawl and disinvestment. The outcome of that process, however, vividly demonstrated the limits of SEMCOG's power and the ascendance of a suburban growth machine.

MPOwered? The Federal Framework for Regional Planning

The Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 is best remembered for creating the "Model Cities" program, so named as the Johnson administration feared that the original name would link the program to the growing number of urban uprisings, an association that the bill's opponents were only too happy to encourage.[6] Less often remembered is the "metropolitan development" portion of the act. The task force that drafted the act had been chaired by leading regionalist Robert C. Wood, author of *1400 Governments*, and had stressed that reversing urban decline could only occur "in the context of metropolitan area-wide strategies." To that end, the Act required the appointment of a federal "metropolitan coordinator" in selected demonstration cities.[7] It also vastly expanded the potential authority of metropolitan planning agencies by requiring all applications for federal aid to be reviewed by such an agency, specifying that such agencies must be "composed of or responsible to" local elected officials.[8] The Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1968 also affirmed the consideration of state, local and regional goals "within a framework of national public

[5] Two decades later, Myron Orfield would outline this strategy in more detail in his books *Metropolitics* and *American Metropolitics*. See Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1997), and Myron Orfield, *American Metropolitics: The New Suburban Reality* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2002).

[6] "I can imagine the kind of demonstration program black power has in mind," said Bronx Congressman Paul A. Fino. "Demonstration conflagration. Demonstration incineration." Roger Biles, *The Fate of Cities: Urban America and the Federal Government, 1945-2000* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 136-9.

[7] Opponents of the proposal like Congressman Fino, echoing the language of Dan Smoot, Jo Hindman and others, denounced the metropolitan coordinators as "federal commissars" who would allow Lyndon Johnson and newly appointed HUD Secretary Robert Weaver to implement metropolitan programs for housing and school desegregation. Wendell Pritchett, "Which Urban Crisis? Regionalism, Race, and Urban Policy, 1960-1974," *Journal of Urban History* 34.2 (2008), 274-5.

[8] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966*, S. 3708, passed November 3, 1966, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-80/pdf/STATUTE-80-Pg1255.pdf.

objectives," including land conservation.[9] These requirements were formalized in 1969 through the Bureau of the Budget's Circular A-95, which specified the process for the "regional clearinghouse review," in which metropolitan planning agencies commented on applications for federal aid. Though "A-95 review" did not give planning agencies the ability to approve or deny grant applications themselves, it did put them in a position of potentially significant influence—depending how much weight federal agencies were willing to give the process.[10]

Most importantly, in 1975 the U.S. Federal Highway Administration and Urban Mass Transportation Administration finally released a comprehensive set of regulations for regional transportation planning. They required regional transportation planning to be conducted by "metropolitan planning organizations," or MPOs, designated by state governors and local elected officials and subject to annual federal review. MPOs were charged with preparing both a long-range regional transportation plan and a medium-term, five-year "transportation improvement program" including all local transportation projects. The new regimen provided "a stronger linkage between planning and programming" that prior federal mandates for regional planning had lacked.[11]

In theory, the powers of A-95 review and regional transportation planning gave metropolitan planning organizations considerable authority. In practice, the structure of MPOs, and especially councils of government like SEMCOG, made it unlikely that they would seek to exercise these powers in conflict with local governments. After the passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973, which designated a half-cent of every dollar of federal transportation funds for MPO planning efforts, MPOs were less dependent on local governments for funding.[12] Yet even if the loss of local government membership dues no longer presented the same existential threat that it had posed to SEMCOG over the previous several years, COGs remained relatively fragile, member-governed bodies that were unlikely to jeopardize their newly minted legitimacy by challenging established norms. Indeed, as Willard Hansen pointed out in a 1968 article in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners,* the new linkages between regional planning institutions and actual policy might in some respects prove a double-edged sword.

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[9] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1968*, S. 698, passed October 16, 1968, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-82/pdf/STATUTE-82-Pg1098.pdf

[10] Carlton Wade Basmajian, *Atlanta Unbound* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2013), 18.

[11] Edward Weiner, *Urban Transportation Planning in the United States: History, Policy, and Practice; Third Edition* (New York: Springer, 2008), 93.

[12] Weiner, *Urban Transportation Planning in the United States*, 79.

"[C]loseness to decision-making," Hansen observed, "has a tendency to produce proposals that are politically and bureaucratically safe rather than socially creative."[13]

SEMCOG Sets a Course

Indeed, as SEMCOG sought to put its troubled beginnings behind it, the organization's new staff leadership reflected a desire for political stability. Executives brought in from elsewhere were replaced by longtime local officials. Both of SEMCOG's top staff members in the 1970s, in fact, were white Detroit residents who had served alumni of the mayoral administration of Roman Gribbs. Michael M. Glusac had been Gribbs' corporation counsel for Detroit—the city's chief lawyer.[14] The son of a Ford foundry worker,[15] Glusac had previously served as a city council member and mayor of Highland Park—the old Ford factory enclave inside Detroit whose accelerating 1960s deindustrialization, racial transition and issues with crime and policing made it a microcosm of the challenges confronting the larger city beyond its limits.[16] In those roles, he had also worked with the city's emerging black political leaders, such as Mayor Robert Blackwell, a former union leader at the Highland Park Chrysler plant elected in 1968.[17] Glusac's deputy, John Amberger, had served Gribbs as superintendent of the Detroit House of Correction (DeHoCo), the municipal prison in northwest Wayne County where Kent

[13] Willard B. Hansen, "Metropolitan Planning and the New Comprehensiveness," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 34.5 (1968), 297.
[14] "Gribbs Appoints HP Council Chief As Legal Adviser," *Detroit Free Press,* February 11, 1970, 1B. Under the city's residency requirements, Glusac was required to move to Detroit as a condition of taking the job.
[15] "Obituaries: Mitar Glusac, 84, Ford Co. retiree," *Detroit Free Press,* Nov. 6, 1978.
[16] In 1966, Glusac had helped to lead the effort for a municipal income tax to shore up the Highland Park city budget. Mary Ann Weston, "Group Urges HP: Drop Tax Vote," *Detroit Free Press,* February 16, 1966, 7D. Highland Park's racial transition occurred in sharp contrast to the neighboring enclave of Hamtramck. There, city leaders had attempted to destroy the black neighborhoods towards the city's edge with the help of federal funds: the routing of I-75 and "urban renewal" for industrial expansion. Displaced residents sued in 1968, initiating the longest-running housing discrimination lawsuit in U.S. history. Ed White, "Housing housing discrimination case outlasts Judge Keith," *Detroit News,* May 5, 2019, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2019/05/05/hamtramck-housing-keith/39447851/, accessed October 10, 2020.
[17] According to the *Detroit Free Press,* the light-skinned Blackwell "had to contend with a double racial problem"—securing sufficient white support (Highland Park was roughly 60 percent white at the time) and convincing black voters of his race. Don Lenhausen, "Negro Scores A State First," *Detroit Free Press*, November 7, 1968, 3A. Blackwell was not the first black mayor in Michigan—Floyd McCree had been appointed mayor of Flint by his fellow city commissioners in 1966—but Blackwell was the first to be popularly elected. Bob Mabbitt, "Was Flint's Floyd McCree the First Black Mayor in the United States? UM-Flint History Department Brings Clarity to the Question," University of Michigan – Flint, February 18, 2015, https://news.umflint.edu/2015/02/18/was-flints-floyd-mccree-the-first-black-mayor-in-the-united-states-um-flint-history-department-brings-clarity-to-the-question/, accessed October 10, 2020.

Mathewson had proposed that Detroit build a new satellite city. Amberger got off to a rough start with Mayor Young when he ran a background check on the new deputy superintendent Young had nominated and informed the Mayor that the man had multiple convictions on his record.

Figure 4.2a and 4.2b. Michael Glusac (left) and John Amberger (right) joined the SEMCOG staff as Executive Director and Deputy Director, respectively, after serving in the administration of Detroit Mayor Roman Gribbs. SEMCOG, "1975 Annual Report," March 1976, CYP, Box 87, Folder 21.

Amberger resigned to join SEMCOG not long afterwards.[18]

Given the personnel involved, it was not difficult to get the impression, as some members of Mayor Young's administration had, that SEMCOG might be a device for Detroit's white political class to maintain control in the new era of black municipal leadership. In fact, Glusac had at one time been discussed as a possible successor to Mayor Gribbs, and none other than Mel Ravitz had also applied for the position of SEMCOG Executive Director following his 1973 mayoral defeat at the hands of Nichols and Young.[19] SEMCOG staff was anxious to counteract that perception. In 1974, the General Assembly approved a proposal that increased Detroit's

[18] Interview with John Amberger, January 19, 2018, Livonia, MI.
[19] Mel Ravitz letter, October 19, 1973, MRP, Box 60, Folder 20.

representation on the SEMCOG Executive Committee from two to three members.[20] 1975, Wayne County Commissioner Conrad L. Mallett, Sr., a former aide to Mayor Cavanagh, was elected SEMCOG's first African American chairperson. Glusac insisted that contrary to some perceptions, SEMCOG was beholden to neither city nor suburbs.[21]

Perhaps the best test of that claim was SEMCOG's actual planning efforts, which began to bear fruit in the mid-1970s after the formalization of federal planning mandates and the growth of federal funding to fulfill them. The goals for SEMCOG's regional plan for the year 1990, amended by the General Assembly of March 1974, were framed in terms of economical, social and ecological goals, reflecting the continuing influence of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s as well as the growing influence of the burgeoning environmental movement and the energy crisis. While carefully avoiding any blanket critique of suburbanization, the document reflected contemporary criticisms of decentralized, auto-oriented metropolitan development, as well as metropolitan segregation.

SEMCOG's regional goals for 1990 stated that the future pattern of land use ought to "increase accessibility to essential activities and amenities of life and to lessen the need for mobility." While affirming that "the need for urban development is unquestionable," they also stressed that "the timing and the staging need to be carefully planned so that the impact on people and the environment is positive and equitable."[22] The decline of downtown Detroit had to be stopped: "A viable major regional core is vital to southeast Michigan." The program made a particularly strong case for altering the metropolitan pattern of racial and economic segregation in housing:

> Low cost and low rental housing opportunity on an open occupancy basis must be made available throughout the region, so that people at the lower rungs of the economic ladder have a wider choice of location and type of housing. Detroit and other older centers of the region cannot be expected to continue forever to bear the entire burden of providing housing and social services for the disadvantaged…
>
> We must open new areas to all kinds of people as rapidly as possible and simultaneously improve the quality of housing and the neighborhood amenities in the neighborhoods where lower-income, elderly and minorities now predominate.

[20] Michael Glusac, memorandum to Mayor Coleman Young, November 25, 1974, in SEMCOG Papers, Box 38, Folder 3.
[21] Frank Angelo, "SEMCOG: Catalyst for regional plans," *Detroit Free Press,* April 19, 1978, 13A.
[22] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, "Prospectus: 1975-76 Work Program," 1975, I-6-I-7.

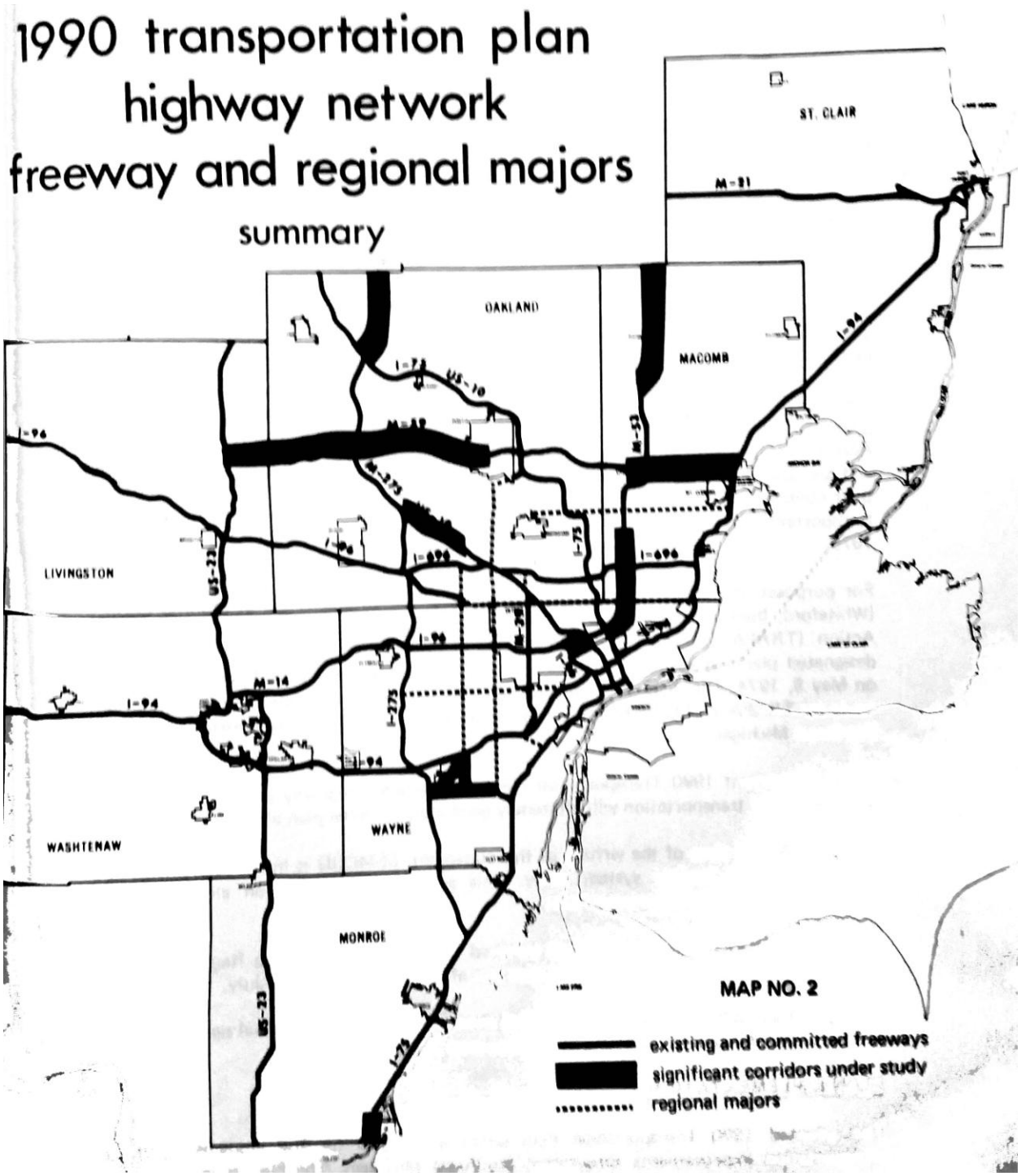

Figure 4 3. Proposed highway network in SEMCOG 1990 Regional Transportation Plan. "Summary Statement of the 1990 Transportation Plan for the Southeast Michigan Metropolitan Region," Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, June 1975, in SEMCOG Papers, Box 39, Folder 22, 47.

Here, in effect, was a recapitulation of the Kerner Commission's recommendations for a two-pronged strategy of "ghetto enrichment" and opening the suburbs.

Somewhat surprisingly, given the history of massive white resistance to housing desegregation in the region, SEMCOG's housing goals do not appear to have drawn much controversy, although a SEMCOG delegate from Grosse Pointe Farms did vote against the adoption of the housing strategy.[23] Of course, one of the jurisdictions where opposition to housing desegregation had been most vocal—Macomb County—was no longer a member of SEMCOG when the document was adopted. Perhaps the most important reason for the lack of organized opposition to SEMCOG's housing goals, however, was that they had little practical import. SEMCOG's direct authority over housing development in the region was minimal. In the course of the transportation planning and A-95 review processes required for federal grant funding, SEMCOG could in principle cite inconsistencies with its regional housing goals. Yet this was an authority it used sparingly. Describing its 1974 reviews, SEMCOG noted occasional issues "relating to urban sprawl of residential development and the corresponding lack of adequate municipal services;" on three occasions, out of a total 93 reviews, it convened an "ad hoc regional review committee" for further discussion.[24] Such restraint is not surprising, given SEMCOG leadership's desire to show deference to local government, and the fact that A-95 reviews were only advisory recommendations in the first place; ultimate approval of grant funds remained the prerogative of the federal agencies themselves.[25]

SEMCOG had more authority in transportation planning, since federal law required SEMCOG approval in order for local transportation projects to receive funding. Nonetheless, the agency was still a newcomer on a scene dominated by the powerful road agencies, particularly the County Road Commissions and the Department of State Highways, which became the Michigan Department of State Highways and Transportation in 1973. Reviewing SEMCOG's first proposed Regional Transportation Plan in 1975, Detroit city planner Paul Rempala was not impressed, despite the removal of several proposed urban expressways. The plan, he wrote in a memorandum to Planning Director William Deane Smith, "does very little for Detroit but

[23] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, minutes of June 26, 1975 General Assembly, in SP, Box 65, Folder 1.
[24] SEMCOG, minutes of March 7, 1975 General Assembly, CYP, Box 65, Folder 1.
[25] Carlton Basmajian argues that "[w]ithout support from the regional agency, an application faced significantly odds at being funded," but given how rarely agencies actually recommended against local grant applications, this claim may be difficult to confirm. Carlton Basmajian, *Atlanta Unbound*, 18.

continues to provide for urban sprawl by indicating a massive road building and improvement program in the outer parts of the region."[26] SEMCOG's proposed "1990 Highway Network" would complete a set of circumferential suburban expressways that bypassed the city of Detroit: I-275 to the west of the city, and I-696 through the Oakland and Macomb County suburbs to the north. The plan also projected the possibility of a further Oakland-Macomb expressway along the M-59 corridor, far to the north of I-696.[27]

The Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA), created almost simultaneously with SEMCOG, had begun to plan for an expanded public transit system, including a series of regional rail lines converging on downtown Detroit, that Mayor Young and downtown boosters hoped would help to reverse the centrifugal trend. Yet while these routes appeared in the transportation plan, there was still no money to make them a reality. A statewide transportation ballot measure that would have helped to fund the plan was defeated in November 1974 after slight majorities opposed the proposal in Oakland and Macomb County.[28]

In principle, the City of Detroit could have attempted to mobilize opposition, at SEMCOG and through other venues, to put the brakes on further suburban highway construction. The city did, in fact, use its leverage with the federal government to raise issues with the construction of I-696, whose proposed route skirted the edge of two adjacent city properties located in southern Oakland County: the Rackham Golf Course and the Detroit Zoo.[29] Yet there was good reason why Mayor Young did not expend too much political capital battling suburbs and the state over suburban expressway construction, since he also relied on them for funding for rapid transit, including a Woodward Avenue subway. Instead, the most effective resistance to suburban highway construction in the 1970s came from a different quarter: suburban residents themselves.

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[26] Paul Rempala, memo to William Deane Smith re: "Recommended Regional Actions," March 3, 1975, in CYP, Box 65, Folder 20.

[27] "Summary Statement of the 1990 Transportation Plan for the Southeast Michigan Metropolitan Region," Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, June 1975, in SEMCOG Papers, Box 39, Folder 22, 47.

[28] Joel Batterman, "Color Lines: Race and Rapid Transit in Metropolitan Detroit, 1969-1980" (undergraduate thesis, Reed College, 2010), 52-7.

[29] The City initially refused to sell off portions of the properties for expressway right-of-way, citing deficiencies in the state's environmental impact statement, particularly as it related to the Detroit Zoo. "Lights from the highway may upset the day-night balance of some animals and birds causing them to moult, shed or breed at the wrong time of the year so that young are born when they are least likely to survive," noted the zoo's director. "A watchman's nightly flashlight used in the Veldt building caused the Ostrich to lay in January instead of May." Coleman A. Young, "Re: I-696," memorandum to U.S. Secretary of Transprotation William T. Coleman Jr., August 13, 1976, CYP, Box 120, Folder 18.

Land Preservation in Oakland County: The Revolution That Wasn't

Amidst the nationwide growth of the environmental movement, and the continued advance of suburban growth, activists across the United States campaigned to conserve rural land, including both farmland and natural areas, from the "urban sprawl" that William H. Whyte had described a decade earlier.[30] In an influential 1971 report, President Nixon's Council on Environmental Quality declared that the country was "in the midst of a revolution in the way we regulate the use of our land…a quiet revolution…[whose] supporters include both conservatives and liberals." In a number of states and regions, the authors stated, exclusively local control over land use was giving way to more comprehensive state systems of land use planning that aimed to conserve land "for the use of the region as a whole."[31] The metropolitan Detroit area witnessed a number of battles over land use in the 1970s. However, these revolts added up to something less than a revolution.

The focus of struggles over development in Detroit were the lakes and wetlands of central Oakland County, where Ice Age glaciers had left behind a picturesque landscape of forested ridges and shimmering water. The natural beauty of the area had made it a favored location for the wealthy since the 1920s, when Sidney Waldon had built his estate at Pine Knob. As postwar expressway construction made it increasingly accessible, residential development spilled further west from Woodward Avenue. One example was Kent Mathewson's subdivision on Chablis Drive, at the eastern edge of West Bloomfield Township.

It was in West Bloomfield that the expansion of highways that had paved the way for suburbanization in metropolitan Detroit for half a century would meet the strongest opposition they had yet encountered. Janet Lynn was in the first wave of migrants to the area. A native of New York's Upper West Side, she had worked for the Women's Trade Union League of New York and earned a master's degrees in political science at Johns Hopkins University, where she met David Lynn, a medical student from the Detroit area. The Lynns lived for several years in Detroit's Indian Village district in the early 1950s—just blocks from where Mel Ravitz was

[30] William H. Whyte, Jr., "Urban Sprawl," in *The Exploding Metropolis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1958), 134.
[31] Fred Bosselman and David Callies, *The Quiet Revolution in Land Use Control* (Washington: U.S. Council on Environmental Quality, 1971), 1-5.

working to organize the Mack-Concord neighborhood—before joining the growing migration of Jewish Detroiters to Oakland County.[32] They originally looked for a home in Bloomfield Township. When they learned that Jews were not welcome there, the Lynns purchased a 30-acre alfalfa farm on Middle Belt Road, between 14 Mile and Franklin, at a time when the surrounding township of West Bloomfield was entirely rural.[33] While raising four children, Janet Lynn also took an active role in suburban civic life. She volunteered with the League of Women Voters and helped to found Temple Kol Ami, a new Reform synagogue with progressive social ideals.[34]

In the early 1970s, Lynn joined the growing number of American suburbanites, influenced by the environmental movement, who were launching local battles for land preservation.[35] One catalyst for her activism was the Lynns' divorce, which prompted David Lynn to sell most of the thirty acres to developers. Janet Lynn continued to live in what a reporter called a "charming fieldstone and clapboard house"—now on just "six wooded acres jammed between two new subdivisions"[36]—and she feared that far more development was to come. In 1972, Lynn and her newly founded organization, the Citizens Council for Land Use Research and Education (CCLURE or CLURE), hosted William H. Whyte, who had helped popularize the term "urban sprawl" fifteen years earlier, as the keynote speaker at a conference addressing the question "Do the Laws Secure Our Land?"[37] They quickly moved into action against a proposal by developer A. Alfred Taubman for a regional shopping center at the corner of Halsted and Maple Roads in the southwestern corner of West Bloomfield. Despite an aggressive advertising campaign by Taubman in favor of the center, CLURE mobilized hundreds of area residents to convince the West Bloomfield Township Planning Commission to block the project, citing what Lynn called its "domino effect" on surrounding land.[38]

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[32] See Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
[33] Interview with David H. Lynn, October 12, 2020.
[34] "Janet Lynn," Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, https://www.michjewishhistory.org/mwwmd/2017/08/janet-lynn.html, accessed September 22, 2020; "Remembering Rabbi Conrad," Temple Kol Ami, https://www.tkolami.org/about-us/remembering-rabbi-conrad/, accessed September 22, 2020.
[35] On suburbanization and the rise of environmentalism generally, see Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[36] Maryanne Conheim, "Suburbs Fight Back at Urban Sprawl," *Detroit Free Press*, April 1, 1973, 14A.
[37] Brandon M. Ward, "Suburbs Against the Region: Homeowner Environmentalism in 1970s Detroit," *Journal of Planning History* 18.2 (2019), 93.
[38] Maryanne Conheim, "Suburbs Fight Back at Urban Sprawl," *Detroit Free Press*, April 1, 1973, 14A. Taubman, a native of Pontiac, had become perhaps the nation's most prominent developer of shopping malls, including what was then the world's largest, the Woodfield Mall in Schaumburg, Illinois. Asked if his developments were

Despite the victory in West Bloomfield, however, another major shopping center was soon approved just a few miles away in the adjacent city of Novi. Lynn spoke out against the proposal, but CLURE's membership did not include any Novi residents, limiting the group's ability to stop the project. Lynn was mindful that her organization might be viewed as "meddlers," but she warned that "a regional shopping center will have a regional impact."[39] By 1976, the steel framework of the new Twelve Oaks mall—partially owned by Taubman, with parking for 6,000 cars and over a million square feet of retail space—was emerging off Interstate 96, heralding the metropolitan area's "westward surge."[40]

CLURE and allied groups enjoyed more success in another fight on their home turf of West Bloomfield: halting the state's proposed extension of Northwestern Highway, which would have cut an eight-mile swath across the township, and the construction of M-275, a northern extension of the I-275 ring road which would have paralleled the township's western border en route to a connection with I-75 north of Pontiac. CLURE took advantage of the recently passed National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and similar state reforms to require that the state prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the highways. After Lynn and her band of activists mobilized local opposition by distributing mimeographed flyers and making phone calls, both projects were cancelled by the state in 1977.[41]

In some respects, local control of land use planning had facilitated local efforts at land preservation in places like West Bloomfield. Mobilizing a broader metropolitan campaign against sprawl, however, was considerably more difficult. Furthermore, for affluent suburbanites whose primary concern was defending their own backyards, local control of land use meant that such a broader effort was not necessary.

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encouraging flight from central cities, he responded: "Look, that's a social question. Why do I have to think about it?" On Taubman's upbringing, see A. Alfred Taubman, *Threshold Resistance: The Extraordinary Career of a Luxury Retailing Pioneer* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

[39] Robert E. Roach, "Group seeks to delay Novi shopping area plan," *Detroit News*, June 26, 1973, 2-B.

[40] Carl Konzelman, "New Novi mall heralds population shifts," *Detroit News*, July 19, 1976, 1-B.

[41] Brandon M. Ward, "Suburbs Against the Region: Homeowner Environmentalism in 1970s Detroit," *Journal of Planning History* 18.2 (2019), 93-4; Lorna McEwen, "Where Are the Concerned Citizens?" *West Bloomfield Patch*, February 17, 2011, https://patch.com/michigan/westbloomfield/where-are-the-concerned-citizens, accessed September 30, 2020.

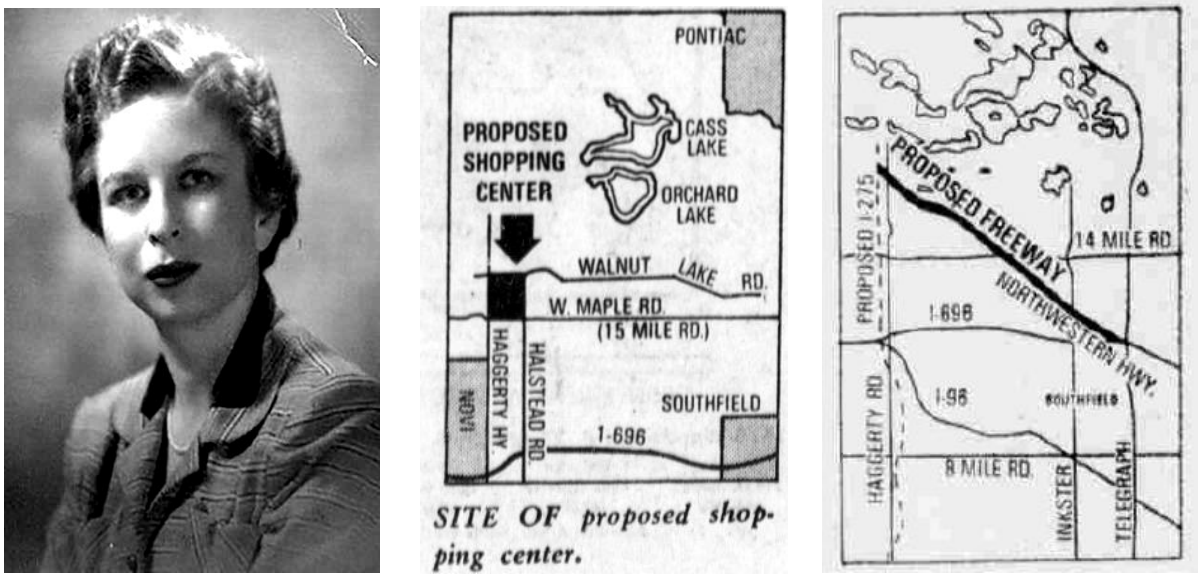

Figure 4.4a, 4.4b, and 4.4c. The Citizens Council for Land Use Research and Education (CLURE), founded by West Bloomfield Township resident Janet Lynn (a), managed to defeat two major developments in the township: developer A. Alfred Taubman's plan for a regional shopping center (b) and the Michigan Department of Transportation proposed extension of Northwestern Highway (c). Jewish Historical Society of Michigan; *Detroit Free Press*.

To be sure, some land use activists, including Lynn, did link their work to the fate of central cities like Detroit. "If we can persuade realtors not to build on open land, but on the destroyed, dilapidated shambles of our cities, we'll all be helping each other," said a homeowner in Franklin, an exclusive enclave near West Bloomfield whose voters approved the purchase of four acres of land to stop a proposed commercial development. Growth management legislation also won support from leaders in inner-ring suburbs, like state representative Philip Mastin of Hazel Park. Mastin warned that "overdevelopment" could turn both Detroit and older suburbs into "ghost towns," forced to "continue providing public services with a dramatically diminished tax base."[42] In 1977, the Detroit Coordinating Council on Human Relations held its annual conference on the theme of "The Enemy: Metropolitan Sprawl," with Detroit Representative Bill Ryan as its keynote speaker. "Unless sprawl is promptly checked by city residents, conservationists, farmers, and suburbanites acting together, the quality of life throughout the entire region may be irreparably damaged," warned Council chairperson Richard H. Lobethal.[43]

[42] Conheim, "Suburbs Fight Back at Urban Sprawl," *Detroit Free Press*, April 1, 1973, 14A.
[43] "Set Meet on Abuse of Land," *Michigan Chronicle*, May 21, 1977, A9.

By the late 1970s, however, whatever tentative beginnings existed of the coalition against sprawl urged by people like Lobethal and Jim Bush were little match for the long-established partnership of suburban developers, road agencies, and local officials seeking to grow their communities' tax base. Moreover, the region's corporate leadership was accelerating the abandonment of the central city. In 1972, the Kresge (later Kmart) Corporation vacated its stately Albert Kahn-designed building on Cass Park near downtown Detroit for a 40-acre office park in suburban Troy. The following year, George Romney's American Motors Corporation, long based on Detroit's west side, announced it was constructing a new headquarters in Southfield. The massive Renaissance Center in downtown Detroit, funded by Henry Ford II, took shape as Ford also sold off land for a new suburban shopping mall, hotel and office complex on the old Ford Fairlane estate in Dearborn, and as the company continued to decentralize production from its River Rouge facility to new plants in southern Wayne County and northern Macomb.

The more enduring legacy of the 1970s was not the land use revolution but the "Reagan Revolution," as a new generation of suburban elected officials worked out winning combinations of pro-development boosterism and the populist politics of cross-class white grievance, a kind of racial capitalism of the cul-de-sac supported by federal expenditures on highways and housing. It was fitting that the 1980 Republican National Convention was held at Cobo Hall in Detroit, named for the conservative mayor who had won the votes of white working-class voters to defeat his union-backed opponent thirty years earlier. Among Reagan's most enthusiastic backers in Michigan, in fact, were two members of the Oakland County Road Commission who were engaged in battling Mayor Young's subway proposal and heartened by Reagan's opposition to further capital spending on mass transit. One of the casualties of the November election was a leading Oakland County environmentalist, state representative Alice Tomboulian of Oakland Township, whose opponent had denounced her support of the subway project.[44] Her colleague Philip Mastin of Hazel Park, who had warned that sprawl's effects would ultimately undermine the tax base of older suburbs, was recalled by his constituents in 1983 after voting for an income tax increase.[45] The Reagan era also brought a halt to contemplated expansion of federal authority

[44] Joel Batterman, "Color Lines: Race and Rapid Transit in Metropolitan Detroit, 1969-1980" (undergraduate thesis, Reed College, 2010), 103-5. Road Commission Managing Director John Grubba was founder and president of Democrats for Ronald Reagan, and Vice-Chairman John R. Gnau Jr. was Chairman of the Michigan Reagan for President Committee.

[45] "Phil Mastin recall, Michigan (1983)," *Ballotpedia*, https://ballotpedia.org/Phil_Mastin_recall,_Michigan_(1983), accessed September 23, 2020.

for regional planning. The president's 1981 budget slashed funding for regional planning agencies, he issued an executive order rescinding Circular A-95, ending the process of regional clearinghouse review and leaving transportation planning as metropolitan planning organizations' primary federally mandated function.[46]

The Regional Development Initiative

In the late 1980s, the proposal for another major regional mall in Oakland County prompted SEMCOG leadership to attempt their most vigorous effort yet to challenge sprawl and disinvestment. An out-of-state developer's plan to construct a massive "mega-mall" called Auburn Mills, off I-75 just north of Pontiac, had managed to unite a wide range of opponents, including environmentalists; residents of Lake Angelus, a tiny municipality of million-dollar lakefront homes just to the west of the proposed mall site; and officials in older suburbs who feared Auburn Mills would doom older shopping centers, like Southfield's Northland Center and Waterford Township's Summit Place, just as that first generation of malls had gutted downtown Detroit and Pontiac. In what the *Detroit News* editorial page called "an unprecedented move," SEMCOG commissioned a regional impact study on the effects of the project.[47] In the end, however, SEMCOG's Executive Committee voted to approve designation of access roads to the mall site as eligible for federal aid, following an "emotional" debate in which Detroit City Council President Erma Henderson said the city could not afford further suburbanization.[48]

"You don't have to be a deep environmentalist or an anti-capitalist to be disgusted by the mega-mall in Auburn Hills," wrote *News* columnist George Cantor. "It is wrong, destructive and a part of me would like gas prices to shoot through the roof so its developers can sit there and look at their empty parking lots for the next 20 years…Unfortunately, we can't change the way we live just by pointing out how dumb it is."[49] SEMCOG director John Amberger, however, was convinced the time had come to try.

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[46] Basmajian, *Atlanta Unbound,* 117; Bruce McDowell, "The Federal Role in Regional Planning: Past and Present," in Gill C. Lim, ed., *Regional Planning: evolution, Crisis and Prospects* (Totowa, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun & Co., 1983), 29-38.
[47] "'Disneyland' on the Doorstep," *Detroit News,* September 17, 1989, 18A.
[48] Robert Ourlian, "2 Auburn Hills roads to get federal aid," *Detroit News,* September 23, 1989, 16B.
[49] George Cantor, "Holy Toledo! Flint, Grand Rapids and other cities start losing retailers—and downtowns," *Detroit News,* September 21, 1990, 3B.

Amberger's personal experience probably helped to inform his decision to take a stand on sprawl and disinvestment. The son of immigrants from Germany, Amberger had spent part of his childhood on their 80-acre apple orchard in Farmington Township, at the corner of Twelve Mile and Haggerty Road, before the family sold the farm and moved to a neighborhood on Detroit's east side, near the Michigan State Fairgrounds. For most of his tenure as SEMCOG director, Amberger lived in the northwest Detroit neighborhood of Rosedale Park, a leafy oasis off Grand River Avenue home to a tight-knit community of residents, including civic leaders like Mel Ravitz.[50] Rosedale Parkers tended to pride themselves on their commitment to racially integrated living in Detroit, even as the city's broader struggles increasingly encroached on their security.[51] The Amberger family had their car stolen multiple times over the course of their years in the neighborhood, and when Amberger became eligible for a SEMCOG vehicle, his wife urged him not to purchase one that might draw unwanted attention.[52]

By the fall of 1990, Amberger had been at SEMCOG for nearly two decades, and felt he had developed a strong rapport with local elected officials and the media. He convened a small task of regional leaders, much as the Metropolitan Fund had 40 years earlier, who included representatives of Mayor Young and Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy, state government officials, business leaders, and the presidents of New Detroit, Inc. and the Detroit NAACP. They would be the steering committee for SEMCOG's "Regional Development Initiative," a year-long process of trend projection and issue area workshops on the future of the metropolitan area, which had as its goal "the development of policy alternatives that might result in a more desired future." [53]

The "trend future" scenario foreseen by SEMCOG analysts predicted that without changes in "business as usual," the region's developed area would increase 40% by 2010, despite only 6% population growth. (From 1950 to 1980, the region's urbanized area had doubled, while population increased at less than half that rate.) Sprawl at the metropolitan periphery would bring further decline in older cities, particularly Detroit, which was projected to shrink by over

[50] Interview with John and Dorothy Amberger, January 19, 2018, Livonia, MI.
[51] On North Rosedale Park in the 1970s and 1980s, see Rollo Romig, "When You've Had Detroit," *The New Yorker,* June 17, 2014.
[52] Interview with John and Dorothy Amberger, January 19, 2018, Livonia, MI.
[53] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, "Regional Development Initiative: A Quality-of-Life Management Project," 1990. The Metropolitan Fund was effectively defunct; it survived in minimal form as a SEMCOG affiliate called the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition. In contrast to the Metropolitan Fund, the RDI Oversight Committee included no representatives from the Big Three automakers, suggesting their increasingly marginal role in regional civic leadership.

200,000 residents by 2010.[54] As jobs decentralized, vehicle miles travelled—the total amount of driving—would continue to increase, having already jumped one-third from 1980 to 1987. Traffic congestion would worsen, as would air pollution, as increases in vehicle miles travelled overwhelmed gains in fuel efficiency.[55] Segregation would continue, and racial and economic disparities would continue to increase, the study predicted, fulfilling the warnings of the Kerner Commission.[56] Indeed, SEMCOG concluded, "[r]acial discrimination has been, is and likely will continue to be the dominant social factor in Southeast Michigan's pattern of fringe development and urban abandonment."[57]

SEMCOG followed the analysis of future trends with an extensive process of public outreach, giving 150 presentations to a variety of local officials and organizations.[58] "When we got to the very end," Amberger recalled, "we were in the process of doing the final report, the public issue, and the question was: What sort of language should we couch this in? Should it be provocative? Should it be weasel words? Should it be careful?" Ultimately, the decision was made to use "the strongest possible terms," in hopes that the report would serve as a "wake-up call."[59]

The RDI report recommended a variety of possible solutions to the metropolitan dilemma. They included a regional review process for major developments, similar to that used for the Auburn Mills mall; improving public transit; requiring impact fees for suburban development; and shifting away from the property tax as the primary means for funding local government and schools, given the inequities it fostered. The report noted that Birmingham in Oakland County, for example, raised over five times as much funding per pupil in local property taxes as did the city of Detroit. Regional tax base sharing, it suggested, might be one solution to the disparity.[60]

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[54] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, "The 'Business as Usual' Trend Future: The Data Base," prepared for Regional Development Initiative Oversight Committee, January 1991, 23.
[55] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, "The 'Business as Usual' Trend Future: The Data Base," 71.
[56] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, "The 'Business as Usual' Trend Future: The Data Base," 51.
[57] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, "Regional Development Initiative: Executive Summary," October 1992, 2.
[58] John M. Amberger, "Urban growth management: The regional development initiative in Southeast Michigan," *Planning Practice & Research* 7.1 (1992), 10.
[59] Erin Lee Martin, "Sprawl wars veteran," *Detroit Free* Press, May 2, 1999, 4J.
[60] Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, "Regional Development Initiative: Executive Summary," October 1992, 6.

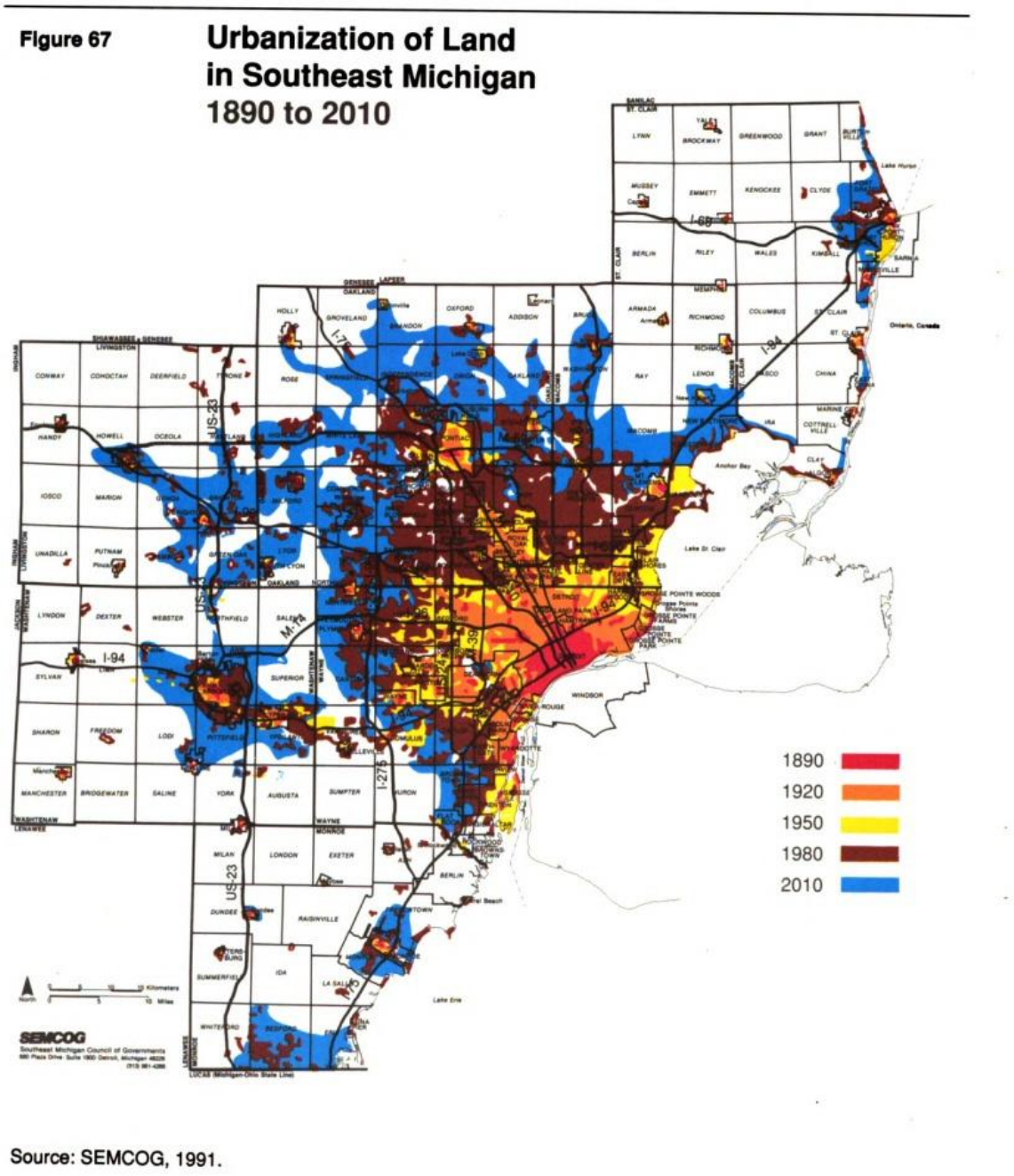

Figure 4.5. SEMCOG's Regional Development Initiative projected further sprawl (blue) through the year 2010 and beyond unless the region took action to change prevailing patterns of growth. SEMCOG, "The 'Business as Usual' Trend Future: The Data Base," prepared for the Regional Development Initiative Oversight Committee, January 1991, 120.

Amberger and his staff were unprepared for the scale of the reaction that followed. The Oakland County Board of Commissioners took the lead in denouncing the Regional Development Initiative, beginning by recalling all their delegates to SEMCOG except County Executive Daniel Murphy, who had suffered a stroke the previous year. Commissioner Jack Olsen expressed fears that the RDI would lead to "more cash transfers to the city of Detroit," as well as loss of local control. "This isn't the first time they've tried this," he added, citing the 1970s proposals for regional government. It was time, he suggested, that Oakland County re-examine whether its $330,000 in annual dues to SEMCOG was "a responsible use of taxpayer dollars."[61]

The Board of Commissioners issued Freedom of Information Act requests for the sum total of SEMCOG's proceedings on the RDI and put Amberger "on trial," as he later put it, with six consecutive weeks of interrogatory hearings. "It was ugly," Amberger reflected. "But as strategy, it was such a good idea."[62] According to Amberger, the commissioners may have voted to pull Oakland County out of SEMCOG and forced his resignation if not for the sympathetic response of Oakland County city managers. Many of them were already contending with tight municipal budgets as development bypassed their communities for outlying townships, and attended the hearings to voice support for the project. "They were the ones who really saved my ass," Amberger recounted.[63]

In a summary of the Regional Development Initiative for the journal *Planning Practice & Research,* Amberger expressed hope that the project might represent a step towards transforming metropolitan development. "For us it is not whether we will adopt a more rational land development policy, it's a question of when it will happen," he wrote. Amberger acknowledged that "many are prospering in this rather helter-skelter development process," and cited the challenges under the political landscape of Reaganism:

> We are a nation that has never had a national urban policy and considers a national industrial policy as subversive, and for the last three presidential elections we have supported candidates promulgating 'less government' as a national goal. Such a background does not bode well for implementing new growth management measures.[64]

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[61] Chuck Moss, "Will SEMCOG derail regional development?" *Detroit News*, February 5, 1992, 11A.
[62] Erin Lee Martin, "Sprawl wars veteran," *Detroit Free* Press, May 2, 1999, 4J.
[63] Interview with John and Dorothy Amberger, January 19, 2018, Livonia, MI.
[64] John M. Amberger, "Urban growth management: The regional development initiative in Southeast Michigan," *Planning Practice & Research* 7.1 (1992), 11.

Nonetheless, to those who suggested that public planning was "subversive" or "un-American," he quoted the apocryphal words of Chief Seattle, and the fact that indigenous Americans had considered the land not a commodity but a public good to be protected for the welfare of all life.[65]

The Regional Development Initiative, however, was largely dead in the water by the time the final report was released in 1993. The SEMCOG Executive Committee voted to strip the report's original recommendation that tax base sharing be given "special consideration," and Amberger was compelled to append a point-by-point rebuttal of various "misperceptions" of the RDI, such as its supposed claim that "[p]eople moving to the suburban fringe are racists."[66] *Detroit News* columnist Chuck Moss, while sympathetic to growth management and transit investment, complained that "SEMCOG had exerted no real leadership," and mocked its "scolding advice to return to inner city Detroit—as if the exodus wasn't driven by the desire to get away from Old Detroit's crime, crime, mismanagement, and more crime."[67] One night not long after the release of the Regional Development Initiative report, one of Amberger's neighbors confronted someone who was attempting to steal the tires off Amberger's car. The would-be thief shot at the neighbor, who shot back. Several bullets struck the Ambergers' home, one near the bedroom window, and the Ambergers decided the time had come to leave Detroit, moving to the suburb of Livonia.[68]

Despite the rallying of the Oakland County city managers, moreover, there was relatively little pushback on RDI opponents from other elected officials. After all, as Moss noted, Detroit Mayor Coleman Young was nearing retirement after twenty years. Moss argued that Oakland County, not Detroit, was now "Southeastern Michigan's 900-pound gorilla—especially," he predicted, "if Brooks Patterson becomes the new county executive."[69]

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[65] Ibid.
[66] "The report does not label individuals or communities by motive," Amberger wrote. "People—of all racial and ethnic cultures—seek a better quality of life when they move. Historically, it has been easier in this region for some to move than for others." Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, "Regional Development Initiative: Executive Summary," October 1992, 8-9.
[67] Chuck Moss, "Slouching toward 'Los Angelisation,'" *Detroit News*, September 26, 1990, 13A.
[68] Interview with John and Dorothy Amberger, January 19, 2018, Livonia, MI.
[69] Chuck Moss, ""Will SEMCOG derail regional development?" *Detroit News*, February 5, 1992, 11A.

Triumph of the Sprawlers

Political leadership in the metropolitan region had not shifted, as Kent Mathewson had urged twenty years prior, from the mayor of Detroit to the chairman of SEMCOG. Instead, fulfilling Edward Connor's older hope of empowering county government in the era of suburbanization, it had increasingly migrated to the new position of County Executive. Oakland County had been the first in the region to take advantage of state enabling legislation to re-organize its structure of government and elect its first County Executive, Daniel Murphy, in 1974. Yet Murphy was a product of an older era in county government. Appointed county register of deeds in 1956, he was fundamentally an "administrator," in the words of *News* columnist Moss. As his participation in the Regional Development Initiative suggested, he viewed his office as a supporting role in the broader metropolitan political landscape, not a regional bully pulpit.[70]

L. Brooks Patterson, by contrast, had rarely been accused of forbearance. Patterson had been raised in North Rosedale Park, where he continued to reside through his graduation from the University of Detroit law school in 1967. After moving to Oakland County, he decided to fight the Pontiac school busing case for Irene McCabe's National Action Group and quickly capitalized on the potential in the politics of white grievance newly salient in Oakland County, winning election to the office of Oakland County Prosecutor on a "law-and-order" platform.[71] Described by *Free Press* columnist Hugh McDiarmid as a "clever, witty, usually irreverent, life-of-the-party type," Patterson kept a miniature electric chair on his desk—he twice ran for governor on a platform of reinstating capital punishment in Michigan—and gained national attention for the facility with which he expressed the widely shared suburban antipathy towards his native city and its black political leadership. "I don't give a damn about Detroit," Patterson told one journalist. "It has no direct bearing on the quality of my life," he explained, comparing the fate of Detroiters to that of "Indians on the reservation": "Those who can will leave Detroit. Those who can't will get blankets and food from the government men in the city."[72] As Patterson prepared a run for County Executive, even admirers like McDiarmid suggested he might

[70] Chuck Moss, "Slouching toward 'Los Angelisation,'" *Detroit News*, September 26, 1990, 13A.
[71] Paige Williams, "Drop Dead, Detroit," *The New Yorker*, January 20, 2014; Maureen McDonald, "The Battle of Pontiac: Integration Wins, After All," *The Ann Arbor Sun*, January 22, 1976, 5.
[72] Ze'ev Chafets, *Devil's Night: And Other True Tales of Detroit* (New York: Vintage, 1991 [1990]), 134-5.

consider moderating his rhetoric: the use of the term "taxjacking," for example, to equate the reform of local government dependence on the property tax, and the amelioration of resulting inequalities, with having one's vehicle stolen at gunpoint.[73]

Patterson was elected County Executive in 1992, and immediately declared a new era of suburban hegemony. "I intend to move past Coleman Young as a regional leader," he said. "Oakland County is the epicenter of activity in the region."[74] During the economic boom of the 1990s, and even into the 2000s, as the region's economy faltered, the metropolitan area continued to sprawl along the lines that the Regional Development Initiative had predicted. Through the mechanism of state government, some reforms to the structure of localist structures did occur, particularly where they also benefited rural Michigan jurisdictions, and Patterson even lent grudging support to the passage of a dedicated, albeit limited, property tax to sustain a limited level of suburban bus service.[75]

Given the new landscape of power in the region, however, and the experience of the Regional Development Initiative, SEMCOG staff made no further attempts to challenge the prevailing pattern of regional growth. The Auburn Mills megamall project, after stalling in the early 1990s economic downturn, was resuscitated by A. Alfred Taubman's Taubman Companies and finally opened in November 1998. Two weeks earlier, the thirty-three-story structure of the flagship J.L. Hudson's department store, shuttered for a quarter-century, had been imploded from within to be replaced by a parking lot.

John Amberger retired the same year, succeeded by his longtime deputy Paul Tait, who had borne much of the backlash against the RDI.[76] Not surprisingly, given his predecessor's experience, Tait was less than sympathetic to activists who charged his organization with complicity in the decline of Detroit and inner-ring suburbs. "SEMCOG needs consensus to move things forward," he argued, emphasizing that the organization's role was not "telling people what

[73] Hugh McDiarmid, "Some Patterson rants need balance, as on tax sharing," *Detroit Free Press*, September 29, 1991, 4G. Some years later, John Amberger argued that the Regional Development Initiative may have been most successful in helping build awareness of inter-jurisdictional tax base disparities. Interview with John and Dorothy Amberger, January 19, 2018, Livonia, MI.
[74] Paige Williams, "Drop Dead, Detroit," *The New Yorker*, January 20, 2014.
[75] Myron Orfield cites Michigan's 1994 Proposal A, which overhauled school funding, and later reforms to state revenue-sharing, as steps towards greater equity, while noting that parts of the latter bill actually harmed the city of Detroit. In the wake of the Great Recession, however, state revenue sharing to local governments was slashed, with particularly dire consequences for Detroit. Orfield, *American Metropolitics*, 173.
[76] Interview with Carmine Palombo, January 5, 2021.

Figure 4.6. L. Brooks Patterson with members of the National Action Group (NAG) in the early 1970s. Jessica McLean, "Remembering L. Brooks Patterson, in photos," *Dearborn Press & Guide*, August 3, 2019, https://www.pressandguide.com/multimedia/remembering-l-brooks-patterson-in-photos/collection, accessed October 1, 2020.

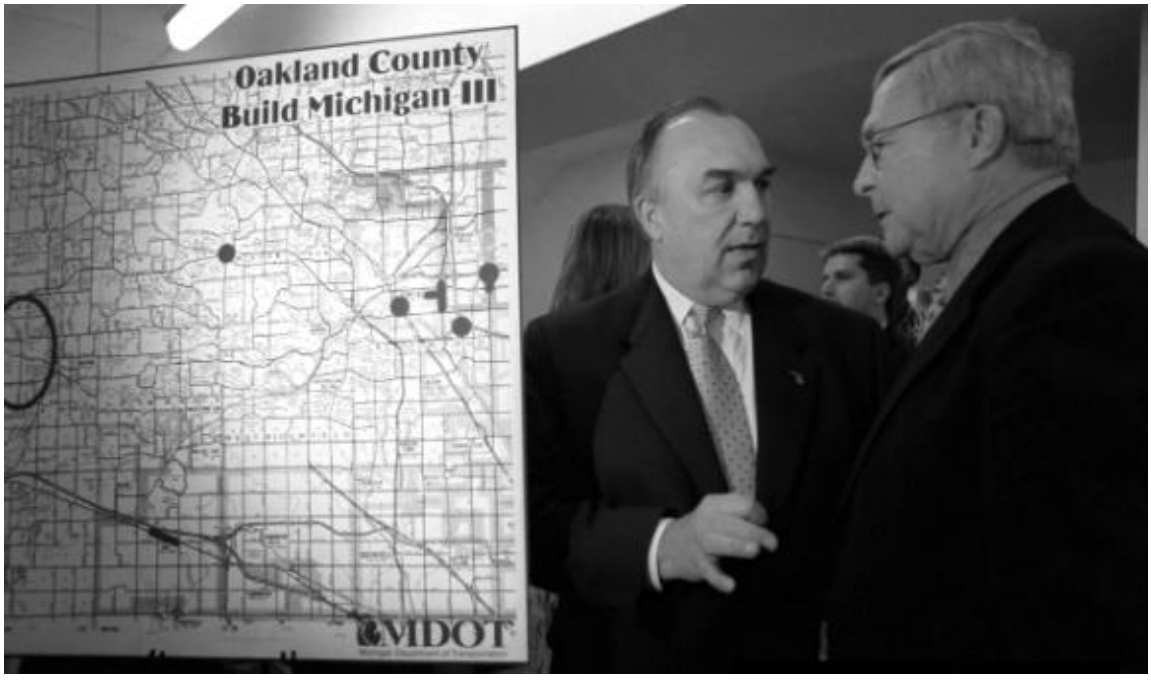

Figure 4.7. Oakland County Executive Patterson (right) with Michigan Governor John Engler at a May 1, 2000 press conference for Engler's "Build Michigan III" highway initiative, with map showing proposed road projects in Oakland County. "L. Brooks Patterson through the years," *Detroit Free Press,* March 26, 2019, https://www.freep.com/picture-gallery/news/local/michigan/oakland/2019/03/26/l-brooks-patterson-pictures/3276632002/, accessed October 2, 2020.

to do," since SEMCOG lacked the power to implement regional plans. "Widely divergent positions on any SEMCOG plan or policy means it will not be implemented." In practice, such a process of "consensus" typically meant that the most powerful actors prevailed.[77]

In an essay titled "Sprawl, Schmall: Give Me More Development," published in 2003 in the *Michigan Real Estate Journal*, Patterson outlined a view of suburban development in sharp contrast to the Regional Development Initiative's conclusions. His philosophy of suburban development framed it as an expression of market ideology, or what Patterson, paraphrasing Milton Friedman, called the "freedom to choose."

> I love sprawl. I need it. I promote it. Oakland County can't get enough of it. Are you getting the picture?
>
> Sprawl is not evil. In fact, it is good. It is the inevitable result of a free people exercising their cherished, constitutionally protected rights as individuals to pursue their dreams when choosing where to live, where to work, where to educate, and where to recreate.[78]

This claim—contrasting a supposedly *laissez-faire* process of sprawl to the specter of land use regulations "turning local control over to state government planners"—erased nearly a century of government planning for suburbanization, from the inter-county highway commissions of the early 20th century to the infrastructure investment that Oakland County continued to demand from Lansing. In his 2000 State of the County address, Patterson had summarized his highway expansion demands to state government, demands he argued were justified by Oakland County's status as the "golden goose" providing nearly one-fifth of Michigan's tax revenue. "Widen our expressways, widen our surface roads, fix our potholes," he urged. "The only thing that threatens our economy is a road system that is so congested that it postpones business expansion or, worse yet, drives business away."[79]

Patterson specifically rejected claims that unrestrained suburbanization might be to blame for the woes of central cities like Detroit. Saturated with the ostensibly "color-blind" rhetoric of homeowner protection, taxpayers' rights, public safety and "neighborhood schools" that had

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[77] Paul Tait, "Moving the region forward: finding the common ground," *SEMScope*, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, Summer 2003, 10.
[78] L. Brooks Patterson, "Sprawl, Schmall…Give Me More Development," Office of the Oakland County Executive, https://www.oakgov.com/exec/Pages/brooks/sprawl.aspx, accessed January 24, 2018.
[79] L. Brooks Patterson, "State of the County Address," February 17, 2000, Troy, MI, https://www.oakgov.com/exec/Documents/state_county_speeches/2000.pdf, accessed October 2, 2020.

driven white politics in the region from the 1940s onward, his account suggested that suburbanites were the real victims.

> The anti-American Dreamers would have you believe that suburban growth is at the root of all problems that beset our cities, both in Michigan and across our country. They seem to believe that citizens left thriving cities, and that it was their departure that caused high crime, high taxes, invisible public services, and failing public school systems.
>
> Anybody who believes that line of thinking is taking denial to a whole new level. Sprawl did not cause the decline of the cities. Cities declined because they squandered their assets. High crime rates, high taxes, failing schools, foul air and a lack of open green spaces forced people to move.
>
> Sprawlers, like me, simply wanted a home with green grass on a safe, well maintained street, a quality neighborhood school that actually educated their children, a good job, nearby parks and recreational spaces, and a local government that actually delivers the services their taxes paid for. In other words, they wanted a place like today's Oakland County.

As Patterson had said before, suburbanites owed the city nothing. They were not oppressors but refugees, "forced" to flee in their pursuit of the American Dream.

Patterson closed his case for suburban innocence with a final twist of the knife, aimed at wealthy suburban advocates of growth regulation.

> [T]he next time somebody rubs your face in the word sprawl, take a long, hard look at that person. Too often you will see some limousine liberal who long ago fled our cities. Now, they want others to go back and take their place. They want to use the power of government to force you back into a city, or a neighborhood, or a housing type they chose not to live in themselves. They want to force you back to the city to help purge themselves of their perceived sin of abandonment.

Whatever the merit of Patterson's speculations on anti-sprawl psychology, his description of the class character of such activism was not entirely groundless. The revolt against mall and expressway development in West Bloomfield could, in some cases, form an elite variation of the same kind of protectionist ethos that led Warren residents to battle affordable housing and Pontiac mothers to rise up against busing.[80]

Yet some of the land preservationists, including Janet Lynn, Alice Tomboulian, and Philip Mastin, had in fact linked their advocacy to a more comprehensive analysis of the

[80] For a version of this argument, see Ward, "Suburbs against the Region: Homeowner Environmentalism in 1970s Detroit."

metropolitan dilemma. They argued that suburbanization was driving the hollowing-out of the urban core and the neighborhood effects that Patterson claimed "forced people to move." By the time Patterson penned his essay, however, the electoral careers of Tomboulian and Mastin were a distant memory. Both had been swept out of office by the same politics of white suburban grievance that had brought Patterson to power. In tandem with the market ideology that increasingly dominated the rhetoric of both parties at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the triumph of that nominally color-blind but deeply racialized politics—a politics that obscured the divergent implications of continued suburbanization on places as different as Warren and West Bloomfield—marked the triumph of the sprawlers.

Conclusion: Towards Reparative Regionalism

On June 23, 2017, a month before the 50th anniversary of the 1967 conflagration, a major new exhibit on those events opened inside the Detroit Historical Museum, a concrete structure on Woodward Avenue that Mayor Albert Cobo had helped to open in 1951.[1] The exhibit marked a bold step for an institution best known for its "Streets of Old Detroit" exhibit, a nostalgic underground simulacrum of the 19th-century city. Some people asked why the museum would even try to address the events of 1967, or "pull a scab off an old wound," as one individual accused project director Marlowe Stoudamire of doing.[2] Despite such misgivings, the exhibit opened to intense public interest and widespread acclaim for its factual depiction of the events of July 1967.[3]

The following January, another, much smaller exhibit opened across the hall, celebrating "50 years of success" in regional planning and governance. To mark its silver anniversary, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments had filled the museum's temporary exhibition space with a variety of data and maps, along with a few artifacts, like old TALUS reports, and a mailbox that invited visitors to "send us a postcard from the future." A historical series of aerial photographs showed the gradual colonization of downtown Detroit by sports arenas and parking lots; another, the transformation of distant Brighton, near the interchange of US-23 and I-96 in Livingston County some fifty miles from the museum, from a diminutive farm town into a sprawling constellation of retail "super-centers."The exhibit was relatively light on narrative interpretation; it was left to visitors to gauge the nature of SEMCOG's "success" from the

[1] "Detroit Historical Museum," *Encyclopedia of Detroit*, https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/detroit-historical-museum, accessed December 19, 2020.
[2] "What makes you think a scab ever formed?" Stoudamire responded. Michael H. Hodges, "Museum exhibit offers perspective on Detroit '67 trauma," *Detroit News*, June 21, 2017, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/entertainment/arts/2017/06/21/detroit-exhibition-detroit-historical-musem/103086850/, accessed December 19, 2020. Stoudamire died at the age of 43 in March 2020, among the thousands of Detroiters who lost their lives in the COVID-19 pandemic.
[3] See Michael Jackman, "Why the Detroit Historical Museum's new 1967 exhibit needs to be seen," *Detroit MetroTimes*, June 22, 1967, https://www.metrotimes.com/the-scene/archives/2017/06/22/why-the-detroit-historical-museums-new-1967-exhibit-needs-to-be-seen, accessed December 19, 2020.

materials at hand. Neither the SEMCOG exhibit nor the Detroit '67 exhibit made any reference to one another.

This dissertation has argued, in contrast, that the two stories cannot be separated. The history of regional planning and governance in Detroit must be understood in reference to the political transformations that occurred in the fifty years after World War Two: transformations in the geography of power in the metropolitan Detroit region, and transformations in national politics as well. Both originated in the pattern of segregated suburbanization that federal policy fostered from the New Deal onwards, and although they were already developing before the urban rebellions of the 1960s, their ramifications grew increasingly evident in the wake of those events. Furthermore, a full evaluation of the aftermath of the rebellion and the rise of black political power in Detroit must take into account the trajectory of metropolitan politics in the decades that followed, including the rise of a suburban political regime that largely rejected public investment in the central city and its people, while promoting the continued development of the metropolitan fringe at the expense of Detroit and, increasingly, older suburbs as well.[4]

By viewing the development of SEMCOG in this broader context, we can better understand why metropolitan planning organizations have not resolved the American metropolitan dilemma of sprawling, inequitable suburbanization. This study began with the question of whether MPOs have simply been too weak to substantively alter this trajectory; whether they have lacked the political will to do so; or whether both factors have contributed. The preceding history supports the third interpretation. SEMCOG's limited authority and lack of political will to address the metropolitan dilemma have been mutually reinforcing. As a result, if MPOs are to play a more meaningful role in resolving the metropolitan dilemma, this must occur through a combination of structural change to expand MPO authority and political change to set MPOs on a course towards "reparative regionalism," instead of sprawl and inequality.

It is instructive to compare the case of Detroit with that of Portland, Oregon. Margaret Weir has described the gradual development of regional planning and governance in Portland—culminating in the nation's only elected regional government—as the culmination of a "virtuous

[4] In an intriguing analysis, Scott Kurashige draws a line from 1967 to the election of Donald Trump a half-century later, describing the white suburban response to the rebellion as "the rise of the counter-revolution." While not without merit, this tends to overstate the role of the rebellion itself; as Kurashige notes, white flight from Detroit was already well underway by 1967, and the preceding analysis indicates that the rise of a white suburban political regime owed more to the structural conditions of segregated suburbanization than to the specific event of the rebellion. Scott Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion: How the U.S. Political Crisis Began in Detroit* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017).

cycle" in which "policy and politics reinforced one another." Early metropolitan planning and governance efforts led to the formation of a Metropolitan Planning Commission in 1957 and a council of governments in 1966. A broad coalition for land preservation passed state laws in 1973 that empowered that COG with the authority to set an urban growth boundary. In 1978, voters approved the replacement of the COG with a new, directly elected Metropolitan Services District. This organization, whose inauguration Kent Mathewson attended during his recovery from his heart attack in Detroit, was ultimately granted home rule status as "Metro" in 1992.[5]

When Kent Mathewson arrived in Detroit in the mid-1960s, it was possible to imagine that Detroit might follow a similar course. In effect, the Metropolitan Fund was an effort to further the kind of "virtuous cycle" Weir describes, building on the work of the region's pioneering metropolitan institutions: the Regional Planning Commission and Supervisors Inter-County Committee. Despite their limited formal authority, these organizations were nonetheless influential in an era when suburban political leadership was in its infancy; when the desirability of suburban growth was widely accepted as a positive by the region's political and economic leadership; and so long as they made no effort to alter the exclusionary terms of the process of suburbanization.

Over the course of the 1960s, however, the definition of the problems to be solved by regional planning and governance shifted. Wendell Pritchett has made this argument with regard to national policy, and this dissertation has shown that it holds for metropolitan Detroit as well.[6] The Regional Planning Commission and SICC viewed their primary tasks as managing suburban growth and facilitating collective action by the panoply of new local governments. As late as 1963, when General Motors President Jack Gordon told Kent Mathewson that his task was to solve Detroit's "metropolitan problem," he probably understood the task in similar terms. Yet in the ensuing years, as the black freedom struggle moved North and black political power grew in cities like Detroit, the most pressing "metropolitan problem" became the so-called "urban crisis," and specifically the problem of racial segregation and inequality. Particularly after the 1965 uprising in Watts, the "metropolitan problem" increasingly came to be understood as intertwined with the American dilemma of racism, as a crisis in black and white.

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[5] Margaret Weir, "Coalition Building for Regionalism," in Bruce Katz, ed., *Reflections on Regionalism* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2000), 127-153; Philip Selinger, *Making History: 50 Years of TriMet and Transit in the Portland Region* (Portland, OR: Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon, 2019).
[6] Wendell Pritchett, "Which Urban Crisis? Regionalism, Race, and Urban Policy, 1960-1974," *Journal of Urban History* 34.2 (2008), 274-5.

The extent to which this was the case, however, varied from city to city. In Portland, where the black population was comparatively miniscule, racial segregation and inequality were largely nonissues in debates over metropolitan planning and governance.[7] In Detroit, where the central city was fast approaching a black majority and the suburbs remained almost exclusively white, they became the dominant issues. As various elements of the federal government and some local leaders broached the possibility of metropolitan desegregation, the concept of planning and governance across jurisdictional lines became particularly threatening to the region's white suburban residents. As white political opposition to black equality mounted, in the Detroit suburbs and across the nation, Detroit's emerging black political leadership increasingly saw control of the central city as its best hope for securing some level of power. "Hollow prize" it may have been, in some respects, but the possibility of other prizes seemed dim when George Wallace had won Michigan's Democratic primary election. In this reactionary atmosphere, practically no black elected official, not even longtime Metropolitan Fund trustee Richard Austin, could in good conscience endorse any proposal that required Detroit to cede control to the wider region.

Perhaps SEMCOG would have weathered the storm more successfully if it had been established a few years earlier, and developed a constituency that extended beyond local elected officials. As it was, the initial weakness of the organization—including its heavy reliance on locally generated, voluntarily approved funds prior to the 1973 federal transportation bill—sapped any political will its leaders had to take bold action on metropolitan problems. Like its predecessors, SEMCOG could only function effectively by broad consensus, and in the turbulent political context, such a consensus proved elusive. Mel Ravitz's shifting position captured the organization's conundrum: as he warned in 1968, SEMCOG risked irrelevance if it failed to tackle "tough social issues," yet as he soon realized, it also jeopardized its survival if it did.

The "virtuous cycle" of expanding influence for SEMCOG thus came to a halt almost before it began. To the extent that such a cycle eroded local authority, many of its members had come to see that prospect as less virtuous than vicious. SEMCOG finally came into its own, ironically enough, by opposing measures to strengthen its own authority , even as federal regulations finally granted metropolitan planning organizations defined (albeit limited) authority

[7] Allen J. Matusow somewhat exaggeratedly described Oregon in the late 1960s as "a state with so few blacks and poor people that it was akin to a giant suburb." Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper, 1984), 409.

and a stable source of funding. Meanwhile, with the adoption of its new optional unified form of government, headed by a County Executive, in 1973, Oakland County led the way towards the establishment of county government, not SEMCOG, as a formidable new political force dominated by the white suburban majority.

As a result, it was not until nearly a quarter-century after the agency's creation that SEMCOG staff, with the tacit support of County Executives McNamara and Murphy, attempted to convene a regional reckoning with the costs of continued suburbanization and disinvestment: the Regional Development Initiative. If not for the loss of SEMCOG's leading allies in Oakland County—Governor Blanchard and County Executive Murphy—the Initiative might have met a different response. As it was, the blowback from Oakland County, and the replacement of Blanchard and Murphy by distinctly less sympathetic successors, ensured SEMCOG would not dare to repeat the effort for at least another quarter-century. Once again, in the context of the agency's limited authority and influence, SEMCOG's leaders believed they faced a choice between their attempts to address the metropolitan dilemma and their own organizational survival. Once again, they chose the latter.

Psychologists have described a condition of "learned helplessness" that can befall individuals faced with adverse events seemingly outside their ability to control. Recent research suggests that this condition is not necessarily "learned" but instead forms a default response, an "unlearned reaction," which can also be reinforced over time through repeated shocks.[8] The story of SEMCOG suggests that this condition can befall organizations as well as individuals.

As SEMCOG treaded water, however, other units of government did not stand still. In 2008, when Macomb County became the last of the region's three most populous counties to adopt a county executive form of government, the transformation of metropolitan political leadership was complete—not from the mayor of Detroit to the chair of SEMCOG, as Kent Mathewson had once urged, but to the so-called "Big Four" of the mayor of Detroit and the three County Executives, of whom L. Brooks Patterson, at the helm of Oakland County's suburban growth machine, was probably the most influential. The 2013 appointment of a state "emergency manager" for the city, superseding local elected officials, and the election that November of Mike Duggan—protégé of longtime Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara—took this

[8] Steven F. Maier and Martin E.P. Seligman, "Learned Helplessness at Fifty: Insights from Neuroscience," *Psychological Review* 123.4 (2016), 349-367.

transition a step further.[9] As Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, acting through emergency manager Kevyn Orr, took the city of Detroit through Chapter 9 bankruptcy proceedings—and reorganized the governance of water and public transit in the region—it was with the "Big Four" that negotiations were conducted, but in a context where the Mayor of Detroit's formal authority had been largely eliminated.[10] SEMCOG played at best a marginal role in these events, which may shape the future of the region for decades to come.

More comparative research into the history of various metropolitan planning organizations is necessary before the story of SEMCOG can be generalized. Yet while Detroit's metropolitan dilemma and the weakness of its MPO are in some respects particularly acute, anecdotal evidence suggests that SEMCOG's history is not unusual.[11] It is instead the "Portland exception" that tends to prove the American rule: weak metropolitan planning organizations that have rarely dared to take initiative to confront sprawl and inequality, even as associated crises intensify. If MPOs are to be a force for positive regional change in the next fifty years, as Gian-Claudia Sciara has urged, planners, policymakers, and the public must reckon with the record of MPOs over the previous five decades, and take corrective action, both to strengthen MPO authority and to push MPOs towards a "reparative regionalism" agenda.[12]

MPOs today have more authority under federal law than they did when they were created, but not by much. More than 25 years have passed since the last major expansion of

[9] Bernard Kilpatrick, the father of former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick (2002-8), also served as chief of staff to McNamara. See Christine McDonald, "Duggan hopes Kilpatrick 'gets a chance to contribute, but mute on clemency," *Detroit News*, February 27, 2020, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2020/02/27/duggan-hopes-kilpatrick-gets-chance-contribute-mute-clemency/4894388002/, accessed January 23, 2021.

[10] See, for example, Lauren Abdel-Razzaq and Christine Ferretti, "County execs rip Detroit over new water authority," *Detroit News*, January 20, 2015, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/wayne-county/2015/01/20/county-execs-rip-detroit-new-water-authority/22062069/, accessed January 23, 2021; Chad Livengood, "Big Four trade more barbs on regional transit as stalemate persists," *Crain's Detroit Business*, April 20, 2018, https://www.crainsdetroit.com/article/20180420/blog026/658691/big-four-trade-more-barbs-on-regional-transit-as-stalemate-persists, accessed January 23, 2021.

[11] See, for example, the story of the New York region's Metropolitan Regional Council—which did not even survive past the 1970s after facing opposition from far-right suburban activists. Joan B. Aron, *The Quest for Regional Cooperation: A Study of the New York Metropolitan Regional Council* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969). Chicago's Northeast Illinois Regional Planning Commission is a particularly interesting case; it languished for half a century before its 2005 reorganization as the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. See Schwieterman, Joseph, and Alan Mammoser. *Beyond Burnham: an Illustrated History of Planning for the Chicago Region.* Lake Forest, IL: Lake Forest College Press, 2009.

[12] Gian-Claudia Sciara, "Metropolitan Transportation Planning: Lessons From the Past, Institutions for the Future," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 83.3 (2017), 262-276.

MPO powers under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act (ISTEA), which granted MPOs some additional authority over specified funding sources and required that their regional plans be fiscally constrained. Yet despite these measures, most MPOs still "have not developed substantial institutional autonomy" with respect to states and local governments.[13] The history of SEMCOG's Regional Development Initiative demonstrates the costs: a reform agenda held hostage by wealthy suburban jurisdictions. Providing MPOs with more authority to allocate federal funding would be a first step towards expanding their powers. State action to provide MPOs with taxation authority, and perhaps even to establish independently elected governing boards, would further increase their independence.

Simply giving MPOs more authority, however, does not guarantee that MPOs will use it to plan for more equitable, less sprawling regions. There are several possible approaches to substantively shift MPO policy. A federal mandate to ensure proportionate representation in MPO governance is long overdue, as many scholars have argued.[14] Coupled with stronger MPO authority, this might contribute to more equitable policy outcomes, but it is unlikely to be transformative, given most MPOs' longstanding attachment to consensus-based decision-making.[15] Federal or state mandates for MPOs to plan for particular outcomes—such as reduced greenhouse gas emissions and diminished segregation—are a logical next step, although they will likely generate vociferous resistance, as the response to the most modest initiatives in this direction has indicated.[16]

[13] James F. Wolf and Mary Beth Farquhar, "Assessing Progress: The State of Metropolitan Planning Organizations under ISTEA and TEA-21," *International Journal of Public Administration*, 28.13-14 (2005), 1073.
[14] Joe Grengs, "Fighting for Balanced Transportation in the Motor City," *Progressive Planning* 103 (2005): 7-10; Thomas Sanchez, "An Inherent Bias? Geographic and Racial-Ethnic Patterns of Metropolitan Planning Organization Boards," (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution), January 2006.
[15] James F. Wolf and Mary Beth Farquhar, "Assessing Progress: The State of Metropolitan Planning Organizations under ISTEA and TEA-21," *International Journal of Public Administration*, 28.13-14 (2005), 1073.
[16] Sylvan Lane, "Trump claims decision to repeal fair housing rule will boost home prices, lower crime," *The Hill,* July 29, 2020, https://thehill.com/policy/finance/509595-trump-claims-decision-to-repeal-fair-housing-rule-will-boost-home-prices-lower, accessed January29, 2021. California's SB 375, legislation passed in 2008 that required MPOs to plan for reduced greenhouse gas pollution, prompted court battles with at least one MPO, San Diego's SANDAG. Damien Newton, "As California AG, Kamala Harris Took a Political Risk to Fight Climate Change," StreetsBlog California, August 12, 2020, https://cal.streetsblog.org/2020/08/12/as-california-ag-kamala-harris-took-a-political-risk-to-fight-climate-change/, accessed January29, 2021. I thank Gautam Mani for bringing this case to my attention.

Ultimately, the surest path to generating political will for MPOs—and other units of government[17]—to confront the metropolitan dilemma may lie in bottom-up organizing to change the substance, and not merely the structure, of metropolitan politics. As this history suggests, MPOs are in many respects remnants of a bygone political era, vestigial structures forged amidst the last gasps of postwar American liberalism. In many respects, the unraveling of regional reform in Detroit embodies the shortcomings of that political tradition: its protagonists' overreliance on a corporate leadership largely indifferent, at best, to liberal goals; their failure to grapple earlier with the racial and economic inequality wrought by New Deal policy; and their inability to articulate a convincing alternative to the local mobilizations, in defense of white suburban privilege and black central city sovereignty, that emerged in that fragmented political landscape.[18] Ira Katznelson wrote that the politics of "community control" of neighborhoods in the late 1960s ultimately detracted from a broader movement for redistributive politics across these "city trenches."

Resolving the metropolitan dilemma, then, may require the revival of liberalism itself, and specifically the kind of populist liberalism that concerned itself with inequality and envisioned a meaningful role for government in redressing it. In retrospect, it seems clear that the "new regionalism" of the late 1990s and early 2000s—expounded by former Albuquerque mayor David Rusk and Minnesota state legislator Myron Orfield, with support from the Ford Foundation, Brookings Institution, and other philanthropies—faced an uphill battle in the context of a conservative national political landscape that was, in considerable part, the outcome of a growing bipartisan rejection of responsibility for the metropolitan dilemma. The era of big government was over, or at any rate, the welfare state was yielding to the carceral state. Orfield might argue that "all communities are winners when it comes to regionalism." Yet in fact,

[17] Given the important role of county government in setting regional policy in metropolitan Detroit, for example, advocates should consider organizing at the county level as an important precursor or complement to region-wide efforts.

[18] Ira Katznelson wrote that the politics of "community control" of neighborhoods in the late 1960s ultimately detracted from a broader movement for redistributive politics across these "city trenches." His reference is to neighborhood boundaries, not city limits, but the preceding history suggests that the latter may have played an even more important role; to extend the Gramscian trench-warfare analogy, it could be said they turned the space of a redistributive metropolitan liberalism into a kind of "no-man's-land." Katznelson, Ira, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

Figure C.1. Demonstrators march in the Oakland County suburb of Troy on June 6, 2020. "Peaceful protest held in Troy one of many in Oakland County this weekend," *The Oakland Press*, June 6, 2020, https://www.theoaklandpress.com/news/peaceful-protest-held-in-troy-one-of-many-in-oakland-county-this-weekend, accessed December 5, 2020.

Orfield's agenda was inherently redistributive, and the primary kind of redistribution in vogue in this era was the enrichment of the already rich.[19]

As we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, however, there are some encouraging signs. Since 2008, skyrocketing economic inequality has become ever more difficult to ignore, and liberals, at least, have largely abandoned the notion that the United States is a "post-racial" society.[20] The Great Recession, climate crisis, and global pandemic have convinced many Americans that there are decided disadvantages in ceding public life to corporate power, and that certain forms of democratic planning may be preferable to a planet "managed by the markets." Even in metropolitan Detroit, there are glimmers of possibility on the horizon. In the Oakland County suburb of Troy, whose city fathers spearheaded the opposition to SEMCOG 50

[19] Myron Orfield, *American Metropolitics: The New Suburban Reality* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2002), 172. It is often forgotten that the phrase "socialism for the rich and free enterprise for the poor," popularized by Michael Harrington in *The Other America*, was borrowed from Charles Abrams' description of mid-century federal housing policy. Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1966 [1962]), 60.

[20] Ta-Nehisi Coates' influential article "The Case for Reparations," which helped to herald this shift, was largely based on several decades of prior research by urban historians on housing policy. Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/, accessed January 30, 2021.

years earlier, a recent high school graduate led a Black Lives Matter march of more than one thousand people down the Big Beaver Road.[21] A new "reparative regionalism" will not emerge overnight or without struggle, but we may hope that the generation to come will refuse to remain prisoners of the metropolitan dilemma.

[21] Varsha Vedapudi, "High School students lead 1,500 person march in protest of police brutality in Troy," *Michigan Daily*, June 7, 2020.

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- *The [Ann Arbor] Sun*

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- *Detroit Jewish News*
- Joseph L. Hudson Papers

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- Rapid Transit Commission (RTC) Papers
- Coleman A. Young Papers (CYP)

Royal Oak Public Library, Royal Oak, MI

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