LIQUOR STORE THEATRE

MAYA STOVALL

WITH A FOREWORD BY CHRISTOPHER Y. LEW

LIQUOR STORE THEATRE

BLACK OUTDOORS
INNOVATIONS IN THE
POETICS OF STUDY

A SERIES EDITED BY
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SARAH JANE CERVENAK

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FOR MY FATHER, MARTIN CADWELL, ESQ.

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FOREWORD

Dressed in black bodysuits, Maya Stovall and two dancers stretch their arms wide, palms facing the pavement, and bring their knees together as patrons of the liquor store come and go behind them. Todd Stovall's electronic music composition blares out of a portable speaker, competing with the rush of traffic. Because this is an unannounced performance—and an uninvited one at that—passersby may be surprised by the dance that is occurring, or perhaps they are unfazed, having already seen Stovall's choreography outside another liquor store in McDougall-Hunt.

Working on *Liquor Store Theatre* since 2014 and deliberately residing in the neighborhood, Stovall has amassed an impressive body of research and performance works that cannot be separated from one another. As William Butler Yeats famously wrote, "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" Stovall's project weaves together anthropology, geography, choreography, performance, conceptual art, and so many other disciplines in a manner that cannot be unraveled. It is useless to make such distinctions. Her performing body is inseparable from the dance itself just as the various lines of inquiry are braided together, forming a unique cord that not only addresses the contemporary conditions of the neighborhood, but also takes on Detroit's past and potential future, along with the broader scope of being black in an American city.

For Stovall, how we know is the operative question. Through such a simple act, dancing on the sidewalk before these business establishments, she sparks so much one-on-one engagement that has led to long-term dialogues.

It is through her performances that she is able to bring into relief what affects the lives of her community: the economic, racial, historical, political, and social forces that shape the area's inhabitants and the built environment that surrounds them.

—CHRISTOPHER Y. LEW / Nancy and Fred Poses Curator / Whitney Museum of American Art / May 2019

Prologue

FADE IN FROM WHITE:

EXT. PALMS LIQUOR—(DAY)—LONG SHOT—It's a tropical Saturday afternoon—Detroit in July. Plastic-beanstalk palm trees loom and bracket a weathered, neon-lit party store at the corner of Gratiot Avenue and Mt. Elliott Street. The store's adjacent parking lot is a jam-up of late-model Detroit steel. Cotton-candy-melancholy hip-hop beats blare from kitted-out SUVs. Chrome rims glint. Fresh pedicures click across the lot. I take a deep breath, look up at the vibrant, cloudless sky, hold-hold-hold, I feel the instant, soak it in—and I exhale. On Detroit's east side, liquor stores sell a variety of snacks, drinks, clothing, household goods, small electronic products, and more, in addition to the obvious offerings of beer, wine, and liquor. This selection—although the products are often overpriced, inferior goods—provides the stores a sort of captive audience of customers in neighborhoods where shopping options, transportation, and disposable income are scarce.

I step into a lunge—ravenous insect, conceptual artist, ballerina—and flip my hands through a pattern of action crossing voguing, jujitsu, and finger tutting. We're in the McDougall-Hunt section of the city's east side—a storied, hard-boiled neighborhood; part of the historic Black Bottom, Paradise Valley, and Hastings Street zones; past or present home to iconic African American figures like performer Lottie "The Body" Graves Claiborne, contemporary artist Tyree Guyton, and jazz innovator John Lee Hooker; and home to the people, the streets, and the sidewalks where my *Liquor Store Theatre* (LST) unfolds. *Liquor Store Theatre*, where I research, and make love to, the streets and sidewalks of the city that made me who I am.

Past is prologue. History is now. *Liquor Store Theatre*, the ongoing conceptual art practice and urban anthropological research project I began in 2014, a series of video-recorded performances and conversations with people about city life on the streets and sidewalks of liquor stores in my east-side Detroit neighborhood, may come off as an abstract, uber-contemporary approach to urban ethnography. While this may be true, *LST* is steeped in a critical historical-materialist analysis of city life, of human existence.

With this prologue, I contextualize *LST* for you as it exists in my mind. In spite of its apparent whimsy, *LST* is part of a scholarly, artistic, and practical genealogy of documentation of, and resistance to, destruction of African American lives. What keeps me up at night, obsessively writing—and the only way I can sleep at night—is to begin this book with a walk from the sixteenth century to the present. With this walk, I launch a corrective against the poverty of thinking concerning African American lives in U.S. cities. In the case of *LST*, we're in Detroit—and I explore here how lives and existence connect with U.S. founding myth. Please walk with me—I promise it will be hard-core.

Political Economic Racism: The Choreographic Machine

JUMP CUT to a CLOSE-UP SHOT of my WRITING DESK, a midcentury modern, oak, little thing. An air plant rests in an itty-bitty ceramic hand; James Boggs, Kellie Jones, Karl Marx, Katherine McKittrick, Cedric J. Robinson, Kathleen C. Stewart, and Michael Taussig's books stack a writerly shrine; a cairn of luxurious, well-seasoned notebooks threatens to reveal a tormented soul. Here I sit, amid years of research, connecting past and present—writing corrective roots for *LST*. I cannot simply begin on the streets of McDougall-Hunt, you see. We need to go back in time. JUMP CUT from my writing desk to images of the early UNITED STATES—the colonies.

Since the 1500s, racism has been the central ingredient in making and continuing the United States of America. Rather than an issue of emotion, racism is a way to get rich without overhead, a way to kill without consequence: racism is the center of gravity of these United States. Why does this matter for *Liquor Store Theatre*? Because I trace precisely the racist U.S. historical threads that weave the fabric of contemporary Detroit. The year 1500 is in 2020. Somehow we've been in denial about this—we need to face it.

In 1526, the first known settlement in the U.S. with African American enslaved people was also the first site of a rebellion, organized by the enslaved people themselves.[1] In a present-day South Carolina town near the Pee Dee River delta, a Spanish explorer established a town with five hundred Spanish

people and one hundred African American enslaved people.[2] The settlement did not run smoothly: "Illness caused numerous deaths. . . . The Indians grew more hostile and dangerous. Finally, [the same year the town was established] . . . the slaves rebelled, killed several of their masters, and escaped to the Indians. This was a final blow and the remaining colonists—one hundred and fifty—returned to Haiti in December."[3]

With records of slavery since the early 1500s, by the 1600s, African American slavery was an economic institution. Slavery generated the first labor-sourced wealth the United States was able to accumulate. Appearing in colonial legislation by the 1660s, slavery was a legalized economic system—a system that humiliated, maimed, and destroyed African Americans to build wealth for white people. It may be a surprise that the historical record shows that African American people used the legal system to fight for their freedom from the start. The 1661 New Netherlands Petition illustrates this point.[4] The petition, written by Dorothy and Emanuel Pieterson, begins,

> To the Noble Right Honorable Director-General and Lords Councillors of New Netherlands
>
> Herewith very respectfully declare Emanuel Pieterson, a free Negro, and Reytory, otherwise Dorothy, Angola, a free Negro woman, together husband and wife, the very humble petitioners of your noble honors, that . . . the aforementioned . . . our son named Anthony . . . may be declared by your noble honors to be a free person: this being done, [the document] was signed by the mark of Anthony Pieterson.[5]

Today, the United States is largely oblivious to the fight against legal slavery that black people waged from day one. Why? Erasure and distortion, over the years, to maintain the status quo.[6] The facts remain. Within the year that slavery appeared as colonial law, African Americans were fighting—from rebellions to legal petitions. And these are just two of many strategies African American people deployed across generations of struggle against slavery and related genocidal, state-sanctioned practices and policies. Like the backstage stories I work to reveal in *LST*, I work to reveal the backstage stories in a radical African American historiography—stories that are missing from popular knowledge.

The CAMERA SURGES, pulling forward a few centuries, to the scene of the U.S. CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION. Contrary to popular myth, the U.S. Constitution never granted justice, defense, or liberty to all people in the United States.[7] Rather, the U.S. Constitution secured justice, defense, and liberty exclusively for white people. These benefits to European Ameri-

cans came at the direct sacrifice of African Americans. The sacrifice African Americans made was not optional—it was the law—through the framework of colonial law, the Articles of Confederation, and, later, the U.S. Constitution. Why are such assertions the opening statements of a book called *Liquor Store Theatre*? The reason is simple: racist power consolidation shapes U.S. historic and contemporary life—from genocide to gentrification. And yet, these same facts remain obscured in mainstream consciousness. I hope to clarify some facts in this book.

Cedric J. Robinson writes, "Founding myths [have been] substituted for history, providing the appearance of historical narrative to what was in actuality part fact and part class-serving rationales."[8] Because "the national government has used the Constitution in such a way as to make law the instrument for maintaining a racist status quo," the U.S. masses have been brainwashed to believe "the myths of Frontier, the paternal Plantation, the competitive capitalism of the Yankee, the courage of the Plainsman . . . the tragedy of the War between the States, the Rugged Individual, the excitement of the American Industrial Revolution, [and] the generosity of the Melting Pot."[9]

This mythical backstory matters for contemporary Detroit, because I hope to reveal how, and why, our thinking is hamstrung. Stuck between the weapons of mass destruction that are colonial, postcolonial, and contemporary political-economic-racist law and policy, American brains are pinned in a complicated vise. This vise teaches us to genuflect to a founding myth—a founding myth made possible with African American people's legislated sacrifice and destruction, a founding myth that necessarily blocks an onto-historical materialist understanding of political-economic racism. These founding myths sculpt the Detroit myths that *Liquor Store Theatre* searches out, interrogates, and documents. Remarkably, African American people have evaded outright destruction and have lived to tell the tale. They tell me the tales day in and day out, on the streets and sidewalks as I film *LST*.

The U.S. Constitution consolidated exploitation and, next, wrote exploitation and dispossession into the letter of the law.[10] The notion of the U.S. Constitution as pursuing an idealistic quest for liberty and accidentally falling short requires adjustment to reflect reality—that is, the reality that the onto-historical materialist formation of wealth, power, and law in the U.S. was sourced from, and subsequently crafted and written to, destroy African Americans. I open this book with a corrective antidote to impoverished understandings of the racist, exploitative nature of U.S. political economic and legislation formations and the way historical formation is understood today.

The U.S. Constitution's racist formation, and the associated formation of U.S. military power, police power, and racist policy across education, employment, and housing, continue to shape contemporary existence. The legislated, Americanist genocide of African Americans, documented in the historical record since the late fifteenth century, continues yet today.[11] In the case of Detroit, the 80 percent-plus African American city that centers *Liquor Store Theatre*, the genocide continues, in slow forms and in fast forms—licit and illicit substances, policing and surveillance, gentrification and displacement, education, employment, housing, erosion of the public commons, and more. These factors form widespread political-economic violence against African American people in this majority African American city.

Local application of economic conditions, perpetuating the status quo, was framed by the Articles of Confederation, in which "state governments were free to make whatever regulations they desired on slavery and the control of [black people]."[12] Moving from United States military formation to the formation of neighborhoods in this city, the historiographic and the ethnographic converge, shining light through popular myth and pressing toward empirical understanding.

The U.S. government, wedded to a political-economic model designed to destroy African American people in the service of wealth creation, bit back with additional legislation and policy. Such policy criminalized being alive; being human; being black. In the early 1700s, "militia laws were designed for slave control," and according to colonial legislation, black people "could not gather in groups, carry weapons, or travel without the permission of their masters."[13] As the nation moved toward the revolutionary period, the American Revolutionary War principles, including "[the revolution's] denunciation of aristocracy, its separation of Church and State, its espousal of a nation's right to self-determination, its overthrow of feudal hangovers, its promise of liberty and equality, its proud avowal of man's right and ability to direct his own destiny and guide his own pursuit of happiness here and now, not hereafter and in some nebulous beyond," were explicitly intended for landowning European Americans only.[14] These pursuits were to be had at the direct expense of enslaved and/or dispossessed African Americans and Native Americans—both of whom the political-economic power formation they supported was intended to destroy. Still, Native Americans and African Americans, from the start, were American patriots. The first soldier to die in the American Revolution was the African American soldier Crispus Attucks. Attucks "was the first to die challenging the rule of Britain, falling dead in Boston, his chest pierced by two bullets, five years before the Battle of Lexington."[15] The

irony: the first American patriot—an African American patriot—fought and died for a country hell-bent on destroying black and Indigenous people. These destructive policies surge to the surface in contemporary Detroit.

Moreover, African American people not only were excluded from the benefits of the U.S. but were subjected to state-sanctioned violence written into the letter of the law. This nation-building history shapes the state-imposed violence we witness today, from police brutality, to surveillance capitalism, to mass incarceration. During the war period between 1765 and 1783, state governments imposed, and increased, violent policies upon African American people. For African Americans, the hypocrisy of the American Revolution was crystal clear. African Americans continued to "make public pleas against slavery and to point out to the . . . two and a half million [European American] people the incongruity and the danger of shouting 'Liberty or Death' while enslaving 750,000 human beings."[16]

And, again, enslaved African American people continued to resist, to challenge, and to defy attempts to enslave, exploit, and destroy them. Between 1775 and 1783, at least 100,000 enslaved African Americans escaped slavery.[17] Aptheker summarizes this mass social movement: "Thomas Jefferson declared that in the one year of 1778 Virginia alone saw thirty thousand slaves flee from bondage, we know many more escaped both before and after that year. Georgians felt that from 75 to 85 percent of their slaves (who numbered about fifteen thousand in 1774) fled, and South Carolinians declared that of their total number of some one hundred ten thousand slaves at the start of the Revolution, at least twenty-five thousand made good their escape." Moreover, "if to all this one adds the slaves who escaped from North Carolina, Maryland, Delaware, and the Northern States, it appears to be conservative to say that from 1775 to 1783 some one hundred thousand slaves (i.e. about one out of every five) *succeeded* in escaping from slavery, though very often meeting death or serfdom instead of liberty."[18]

Post–American Revolution, states asserted "the continued existence of slavery as an institution by reenacting and expanding the body of colonial laws on the subject."[19] In other words, the transition from colonial rule to American independence, paradoxically, reflected increased racist, genocidal, political-economic laws and policies. In other words, state governments imposed oppressive, punitive, corporal, and genocidal forms of surveillance and policing, with "militia and citizen patrols [remaining] primarily responsible for the control of the black population."[20] African American people continued to challenge and resist such oppressive legislation and policy.

Enslaved African American people used the American Revolution to exit slavery. As Aptheker indicated, "[black people] who escaped their masters and mistresses [joined] the British forces or . . . fled to the interior, where they lived as maroons or faded into Indian communities."[21] Contra myth, enslaved African Americans were not a "contented and docile coerced labor force."[22] Rather, African American people strategized and executed "massive defections from slavery" over centuries of colonial and U.S. enslavement.[23]

Moreover, African American enslaved people contributed to the U.S. victory against the British in mass numbers, with five thousand or more African American people serving in the U.S. army and navy revolutionary forces, making up an estimated 10 percent of military forces in any given battle.[24] African Americans also exited slavery by fleeing not only to serve in war but to move to frontier life. Dating from at least 1672 through 1864 at Thirteenth Amendment Eve, thousands of formerly enslaved African Americans, historically called maroons, set up communities in frontier areas near and/or together with Native American people.[25]

As the United States moved toward the Constitutional Convention that would take place in 1787, African American "oppression through the system of slavery [survived] the Declaration of Independence and American Revolution and would now become an integral part of American constitutional law."[26] African Americans' and Native Americans' interconnected political economic oppression and genocide appeared in related and differing ways at the Constitutional Convention. A common thread was that the newly forming U.S. government acquired power on the basis of oppression, and (paradoxically) due to this oppression, considered African American people and Native American people military threats.[27] With this backdrop, the U.S. Constitution surfaced as a deliberately racist and genocidal document, designed to promote European American power and domination at any expense.

In the case of Native American people, "having engaged in numerous wars with colonial forces, tribes were seen as potential military opponents, not wholly unlike foreign powers, at the time of the Constitution's drafting."[28] In the case of African American people, the Constitutional Convention delegates discussed "the relationship between slavery and the use of national military forces," with Rufus King stating that "importing additional slaves would make national defense more difficult and costly."[29] In the case of workers and the poor, "debtor disturbances, among them Shay's Rebellion, a revolt of impoverished farmers against taxation and the judiciary, which had

threatened a federal arsenal at Springfield, Massachusetts," showed that the military powers and the central government of the U.S. must be strengthened to maintain the status quo in relation to potential uprisings of working-class, low-income people.[30] The historic uprisings people staged at nation-forming reverberate in contemporary Detroit.

Constitutional language referencing state-sanctioned policies of African American genocide, Native American genocide, and working-class domination through political-economic legislation and policy was not necessary—such hegemonic legislation and policy was built into the founding document and structured to execute the dominance of the European American majority. Moreover, the clauses of the Constitution explicitly reflected the Constitution's central goal to maintain European American political, economic, military, social, and cultural dominance.

"The Fugitive Slave Clause of the Constitution was . . . adopted with little debate," reflecting "the commitment of the national government to protect slavery" and to systematically destroy African American people through the powers of the Constitution.[31] In addition, in the case of Native Americans, the Treaty Clause and the Commerce Clause reflected the U.S. government's first step toward "development and implementation of policies meant to destroy American Indian tribes."[32]

JUMP CUT to my WRITING DESK in the CONTEMPORARY UNITED STATES, in a faculty apartment at California State Polytechnic University (Pomona), where I'm an assistant professor in the Liberal Studies Department. CUT to a MEDIUM SHOT. I'm leaning over a notebook and a laptop. I am trying to write us from the past to the present. Through this backdrop of genocide, we understand how African American people's legislated domination and oppression built the foundation and wealth of the U.S. economic system and the foundation of U.S. military power.

Moreover, we understand that the U.S. Constitution is the foundation of the constructed white supremacist dominant narrative, with African Americans configured as persons to be exploited, oppressed, and destroyed by the very military powers that their political-economic exploitation has financed. African Americans formed the template for progressive social movements from day one, providing a priceless resource to all other persons who would source this template in the future. From this reality, I zoom in on the case of Detroit, where the national racist calculus is transposed and amplified. Racism, remember, is not about preference or emotion. It's about life and death. Detroit, currently in the throes of a brutal urban process, continues the arc of racist political economic exploitation, oppression, and destruction

first documented in the U.S. centuries ago. Detroit, then, is the contested site where we continue our discussion from genocide to gentrification.

Detroit: Nineteenth Century to Present

The CAMERA PULLS IN and we're squarely in DETROIT. In many ways, the city of Detroit reflects the contradictions inherent in the United States. With its population of approximately 673,104, the 139-square-mile city feels spacious and familiar—yet big-city moving—as you push through the streets in sculpted Detroit steel, on foot, or on the city's weathered public transportation system.[33] In Detroit proper, African American people make up 80 percent of the population; European American people, 14 percent, and Latinx American people, 8 percent.[34] The area is incredibly diverse ethnically, including many, many more groups in addition to the relatively larger groups mentioned here. There is a significant Middle Eastern population (estimated around 200,000, one of the largest populations outside the Middle East itself) in the predominantly working-class suburb of Dearborn, Michigan, to the west of Detroit. Tracing state violence to Detroit, African Americans were formally enslaved in Detroit until 1837, when slavery was abolished in Michigan at statehood, and the U.S. Constitution's Fugitive Slave Clause had historic implications in Detroit.[35]

In 1833, Detroit erupted into a rebellion as an African American couple, Ruth and Thornton Blackburn, were followed there by a mob from Kentucky—a mob hoping to force the Blackburns to return to slavery in that state.[36] The Blackburns were not willing to return to slavery. They resisted, along with African Americans across the city and their allies, and staged a successful rebellion on the steps of downtown Detroit's courthouse, just two miles from the McDougall-Hunt neighborhood, right off Gratiot Avenue, close to the streets where *LST* unfolds. The Blackburns were able to flee to Canada, which, ironically, at the time was maintaining centuries of state-imposed genocidal policies toward Aboriginal Canadians. African Americans in Detroit, however, did not resist only through means of rebellion. In 1843, African Americans of Michigan hosted the Michigan Negro Convention, convening twenty-three delegates in Detroit on October 26 and 27.

William Lambert, the committee chair of the convention in Detroit, wrote the call for the 1843 meeting: "Shall we not meet together, and consult how we may better our condition? Shall we not infuse into the minds of our young men, and posterity, a disposition to be free, and leave their present low and degraded employment, and endeavor to obtain mechanical arts, and fol-

low agricultural pursuits? Shall we not meet together and endeavor to promote the cause of Education, Temperance, Industry, and Morality among our people?"[37] Lambert's focus on political-economic equity continued in Detroit and across the state of Michigan. In 1861, when the American Civil War began at Fort Sumter, African Americans around the U.S., including Detroit, began writing letters of interest to Simon Cameron, Abraham Lincoln's secretary of war.[38] G. P. Miller, an African American man in Battle Creek, Michigan, wrote to Cameron on October 30, 1861, intending to seek the "privilege of raising from five to ten thousand free men to report in sixty days to take any position that may be assigned us (sharpshooters preferred). . . . A part of us are half-breed Indians and legal voters in the State of Michigan. We are all anxious to fight for the maintenance of the Union."[39]

The abolition of slavery in the U.S. brought on more racist legislation and policy through Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws were directly designed to destroy African Americans through political-economic, educational, occupational, and everyday violence. Jim Crow laws—an ideal type of genocidal political-economic machinery—spread across the U.S. Meanwhile, thousands of African American people moved throughout the U.S. to cities including Detroit.

Between 1900 and 1950, Jim Crow's oppressive Southern crush, and thousands upon thousands of brutal murders known as lynchings, encouraged 1.5 million African Americans to move north.[40] What African American people found, however, was a brutal reality that Northern cities like Detroit were steeped in "more durable and immovable obstacles of de facto apartheid" across every aspect of life, including policing, housing, education, and employment.[41] From the late nineteenth century on, as African American movements worked to dismantle four hundred years of Jim Crow and predecessor law, racist police brutality and lynchings intensified across the country. Detroit was no exception. Federal, state, and local government-sanctioned and underwritten housing discrimination against African Americans continued, with real estate redlining, racially restrictive covenants, and congressional housing acts of the 1920s and 1930s converging toward economic destruction.[42]

September 1915 started Detroit's demographic transformation as African Americans rapidly began moving to the city. In "May, June, and July of 1916, one thousand blacks were arriving in the city every month," and "the United States Department of Labor estimated that during 1916–17, between 25,000 and 35,000 blacks came to Detroit. . . . By 1926, 85 percent of the black population had come to Detroit in one decade."[43] The numbers are stunning—"Detroit's [African American] population increased 611% from

1910 to 1920 and nearly 200% during the 1920s."[44] However, what is less well known is that racially restrictive real estate covenants were already in place by the end of World War I.[45] As Gotham writes, "Racially restrictive covenants were contractual agreements between property owners and neighborhood associations that prohibited the sale, occupancy or lease of property and land to certain racial groups, especially blacks. Racially restrictive covenants did not exist before 1900 and legal restrictions on the transfer and sale of property were contained in deed restrictions which covered single parcels of land. After 1910, the use of restrictive covenants became more widespread through the promotional efforts of large 'community builders,' local real estate boards and national real estate associations, especially the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB), created in 1908."[46]

Between 1910 and 1920, "real estate boards in Chicago, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Detroit, and other cities had approved measures endorsing the maintenance of racial homogeneity to protect property values and neighborhood stability," normalizing racialized economic inequality in early twentieth-century city neighborhoods.[47] Racialized economic inequality was and remains a reality of the most domestic and intimate sort: racism and brutal economic exclusion are the foundation of American neighborhoods.

In 1924, the NAREB amended its code of ethics to read, "A Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood . . . members of any race or nationality . . . whose presence will clearly be detrimental to the property values in that neighborhood." As Gotham writes, NAREB's views were pervasive across real estate professionals and the European American mainstream. "In one early real estate textbook," *City Growth and Values*, Gotham writes, the authors of the textbook, Stanley L. McMichael and Robert Fry Bingham, argued that "'[African American] people must recognize the economic disturbance which their presence in a [European American] neighborhood causes and forego their desire to split off from the established district where the rest of their race lives.'"[48] Across mainstream textbooks, "segregationist real estate ideology" gained momentum and authority, pinning Americans' thinking about space, place, and culture into mystified, naturalized, hierarchical strata. Not only did textbooks reflect such thinking, but the politics and grind of the day-to-day did, as well.

In June 1925, Ossian Sweet, a black physician, bought a home in northeast Detroit. This neighborhood was majority European American, although the prior owners of the new home of Dr. Sweet and his family were more ethnically diverse than was known at the time. (Edward Smith, the previous owner, was a fair-skinned African American whom neighbors assumed was

European, and Smith's wife was European American.)[49] After learning that the Sweet family was moving in, hostile residents formed a neighborhood improvement association (code for racist mob) called the Waterworks Improvement Association.

In September of the same year, the Sweets moved into their new home. They were not met with casserole and champagne. Rather, they were met with rocks, guns, and hostile white mobs. Noticing a hostile mob forming, friends and family joined Dr. Sweet and his wife, Gladys, including Sweet's brother (a dentist), seven friends, and a local college student. With a modest group of eleven people protecting their home, the Sweets were vastly outnumbered.

A *Detroit News* reporter, Philip A. Adler, testified for the defense at the subsequent trial. He was at the scene of the shooting and told of a "considerable mob" of between "400 and 500," and stones hitting the house "like hail." "I heard someone say, 'A Negro family has moved in here and we're going to get them out,'" Adler testified. "I asked a policeman what the trouble was and he told me it was none of my business."[50]

Four to five hundred hostile neighbors waged an assault on the Sweet home. As Dr. Sweet's brother entered the home, the mob intensified. People threw rocks, shouted slurs, broke glass, and advanced closer and closer to Dr. Sweet's family home.[51] Gunshots surged from the mob, the police, and the home. The Sweets defended themselves. Two members of the hostile mob were shot, and one was killed. Everyone in the Sweet home was arrested and charged with murder. A long trial followed. Clarence Darrow defended Henry Sweet, Ossian Sweet's brother. Darrow's defense and the Sweets' determination ultimately resulted in a self-defense ruling.[52] Although the Sweet case had a relatively just ending, many more similar cases did not, with police brutality, mob violence, and Ku Klux Klan organizing intensifying across the city from the 1920s through the 1940s.[53]

During African Americans' continued mass migration to northern cities like Detroit, segregationist residential policies and practices were intensified and complemented by egregious employment discrimination. Accumulation by dispossession practices remain in contemporary Detroit, and the history runs deep. Moreover, the structures and practices of accumulation by dispossession are wide ranging and viral over time. David Harvey describes the practices as follows: "Commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; conversion of various forms of property rights—common, collective, state, etc.—into exclusive private property rights; suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of

labor power and the suppression of alternative, indigenous, forms of production and consumption; colonial, neo-colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets, including natural resources; monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; slave trade; and usury, the national debt and ultimately the credit system.[54] In the Detroit case, the early twentieth-century "labor market favored white workers over black workers regardless of the skill of the latter or their longevity in the city. Black workers discovered that European immigrants could arrive in Detroit without jobs or skills and without a knowledge of English use white-skin privileges to secure better housing and better jobs than blacks."[55]

In midcentury Detroit, the city's increasingly decentralized manufacturing economy was already hemorrhaging jobs—with 130,000 manufacturing jobs lost between 1948 and 1967.[56] Meanwhile, racism intensified in Detroit labor markets as "war production policies" allowed African Americans to begin to enter "so-called white jobs" previously open only to European Americans.[57] European American workers responded with "hate strikes." Such hate strikes explicitly protested "the upgrading and transferring of black workers to jobs from which they had been excluded by tradition."[58]

As the automotive manufacturing industry drained jobs and shop floors oozed racism, racialized disparities deepened across realms of social life including policing, housing, and education. In 1943, there were just forty-three African American officers on Detroit's 3,400-member force.[59] Racist disparities were part of everyday life, and African Americans found themselves profiled, harassed, and brutalized in disproportionate numbers: "White policemen were not infrequently the source of many racial problems in Detroit during the post-war period. Operating much like foreign soldiers occupying colonies, they appeared to many as being concerned only with protecting the rights of the white majority against the black minority. In the period between 1943 and 1953, police brutality was a symbol of everything that was wrong with Detroit."[60]

Complaints to the NAACP reflect such conditions.[61] "The NAACP, along with other groups, spent much of their time processing complaints against the police department. The black community found itself using the courts to clarify the use of firearms by white police officers in apprehending persons suspected of crime. Unfortunately, the issue was never resolved and continues to the present day."[62] As Darden writes, "historically, such patterns of uneven economic and social development have contributed to protracted racial estrangement and conflicts in Detroit—for example, the 1942 Sojourner Truth housing riot, the 1943 riot, and the 1967 rebellion."[63] After the 1942

Sojourner Truth Housing Project Rebellion, in which white mobs protested the presence of black people in a new government housing initiative, Detroit's 1943 Rebellion, again, was about economic violence.[64] Often misrepresented as about emotional race relations, and often described as a race riot, the 1943 Rebellion wasn't that simple. The reality is, the 1943 Rebellion resisted government-legislated and state-sanctioned discriminatory policies such as racially restrictive covenants, racialized police brutality, and discriminatory employment practices. The months and weeks leading up to the 1943 Rebellion, on the shop floors of Detroit automotive factories, tell the story.

In February 1943, three African American women workers were promoted to semiskilled trade jobs at Detroit's Packard Automotive Manufacturing Plant. Previously, African American women were relegated to janitorial jobs only—and were not allowed to apply for any other jobs. Soon after the workers were promoted, all hell broke loose. After months of hate strikes and union meetings, in the weeks leading up to the 1943 Rebellion, 39,000 European American workers walked out of the Packard Plant to protest African American people accessing better employment options.[65]

In June 1943, the Rebellion opened up, following the massive Packard Plant hate strike. The 1943 Rebellion emerged in Detroit's Paradise Valley neighborhood, following an incident on Belle Isle. Different versions of the story reflect confrontations between young European Americans and African Americans. The grossly unequal conditions endured by African Americans, and European American hostility toward progress, were at the center of the 1943 Rebellion. Employment discrimination, housing discrimination, educational discrimination, and police brutality laid the groundwork for resistance. Thirty-four people died in the 1943 Rebellion; twenty-five of them were African American.

The majority of the people arrested for property damage were African American, although accounts report that both white and black people participated in property damage and looting.[66] Just like the U.S. founding myths, the Detroit myths were created by those in power, with the "official riot report . . . charging [African Americans] for inciting the riot."[67] Today, I write to clarify those myths. Weeks earlier, 39,000 hostile European Americans shut down the Packard Plant to protest the promotion of three African American women. The facts speak for themselves. The attorney Thurgood Marshall and NAACP president Walter White prepared a rebuttal to the report, collecting evidence through historical and political-economic context and interviews, demonstrating that the rebellion was an act of resistance to long-term inequality, and that whites were equally involved.[68]

As the 1940s wore on in Detroit, entrenched, legislated, and structuralist racism intensified. In 1948, "65 percent of all job openings in Detroit contained written discriminatory specifications" against African Americans in particular.[69] In 1953, conditions were even worse: 83 percent of 417 surveyed Detroit manufacturing jobs were designated for European American workers only.[70] Hurtling through midcentury Detroit, labor and political-economic progress were inextricably linked. Perhaps no one represented the consolidation of these forces more than the labor organizer and World War II veteran Coleman Young.

In 1952, Coleman Young spoke on behalf of Detroit's African American leaders before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC).[71] The HUAC, investigating suspicions of "communism in defense industries," was chaired by John Wood of Georgia.[72] Coleman Young "denounced segregation and pointed out that in Georgia, 'Negro people are prevented from voting by virtue of terror, intimidation, and lynchings.'"[73] Moreover, Young pointed out the paradox of the HUAC's claim of un-American activities, given the un-American treatment of African Americans writ large throughout the U.S., as de facto and de jure legislation and practice converged to destroy African American lives. In response to HUAC's question of whether Young would serve in the U.S. armed forces should Soviet forces attack the U.S., Young replied, "I fought in the last war and I would unhesitatingly take up arms against anybody that attacks this country. In the same manner I am now in the process of fighting discrimination against my people. I am fighting against un-American activities such as lynching and denial of the vote. I am dedicated to that fight and I don't think I have to apologize or explain it to anybody."[74]

The nuance of Young's critique—that racist, un-American activities were part of the fabric of U.S. political-economic and social life—was lost on most people at the time. While African Americans on the streets of Detroit embraced Young's testimony for its honesty, European American vigilantes in Detroit "were determined to reassert racial hierarchy and punish anyone who undermined segregation."[75] European American workers at the "Chrysler and Midland plants used traditional racial epithets and scare tactics like lynching and hanging in effigy" to intimidate persons supposedly associated with the Communist Party.[76]

However, European Americans were not so much concerned with communism as they were with communism's association—scaffolded by Young in part at the HUAC hearing—with civil rights.[77] Moreover, although the vigilantes' actions were extreme, their views represented the European Ameri-

can mainstream. In 1952, "68 percent of respondents in a survey of whites in Detroit proposed that the city deal with its racial problems through some form of segregation."[78] The connection between political-economic racism, legislation, and policy, again, is crystal clear, from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century.

Meanwhile, in concert with the four-hundred-year peak and crescendo of legalized human trafficking and genocide, Jim Crow legislation, lynchings, and the gradual overturn of segregation vis-à-vis the African American civil rights movement, a new, equally deadly form of segregation emerged—geographic apartheid, often referred to in code as "suburbanization."[79] In Detroit, geographic apartheid was expressed in residential and commercial terms—with both manufacturing plants and residential real estate. As Detroit was sucked dry, wealth and capital were consolidated in distant suburbs that were legislated, configured, and practically designated *white only*.[80]

Racialized, geographic apartheid across employment, education, and housing economically debilitated African American people during the 1950s and 1960s. Detroit's government-underwritten suburbanization, or geographic apartheid, secured and isolated superior employment, education, and housing for European Americans only.[81] Between 1950 and 1980, "the number of city residents employed in manufacturing jobs dropped 68 percent, from 349,000 jobs to 113,000 jobs," converging with the city's "dramatic white out-migration during the 1970s."[82] Contra the myth that European Americans were fleeing African Americans, a myth supported by the linguistic term "white flight," European Americans were actually moving to align with superior, white-only employment, education, and housing opportunities. African American people were disproportionately negatively impacted by the resulting racist, segregationist housing, education, and employment disparities.[83]

Massive European American out-migration from central cities alongside industrial suburbanization, manufacturing deindustrialization, and/or manufacturing reindustrialization were not unique to Detroit—across the U.S., sun-belt cities like Los Angeles, frost-belt cities like Cleveland, and rust-belt cities like Pittsburgh reflected similar geographic apartheid trends.[84] In the Detroit case, the people's choreography between city and suburbs—and the demography of the people moving—continues to be marked with accumulation by dispossession central to geographic apartheid.

Efforts to redevelop were, ironically and bitterly, steeped in the racism that initiated the reverse choreography in the 1950s so that "close examination of the urban renewal plan in Detroit, with a special focus on redevelop-

ment at the Gratiot site, demonstrate[d] the early tendency of the city to clear low-income, black residents from central-city land in order to try to attract white, middle-income people back to the city as well as to keep medical and educational institutions."[85]

Between 1946 and 1958, for instance, Gratiot and Lafayette Park redevelopment resulted in the condemnation of "129 acres" and "relocation of 1,950" African American families while a brand-new, twenty-two-story apartment building with luxury-rental price tags, intended for new European American renters, was finally built.[86] Lafayette Park, today, remains an upscale downtown Detroit neighborhood. Unbeknownst to many, however, the neighborhood also continues to symbolize redevelopment and urban process "in a societal context of racial prejudice and segregation."[87] Amid founding myth and Detroit narrative myth, historicizing key events to account for the reality—that legislated racism is the root cause of tremendous challenges—is critical. Detroit's 1967 Rebellion is such an event.

In July 1967, African Americans made up just 5 percent of Detroit's police department; were economically hamstrung by racist housing, employment, and education legislation; and were subjected to everyday racist practices of fellow Detroiters, police, and the national government alike.[88] The injustices between 1526 and 1967 wove a long, tense thread as Detroit police raided an African American after-hours club, initiating what would be the "bloodiest rebellion in a half-century and the costliest, in terms of property damage, in U.S. history."[89] All in all, at the end of the rebellion, "34 people were dead, 347 people were injured, 3,800 people were arrested," and "5,000 people were homeless, most of them black."[90] The majority of the people killed, injured, and arrested were also African American.[91] The estimated $50 million in property damage was the result of 1,000 burned buildings and 2,700 businesses subjected to property damage.[92]

The 1967 Rebellion, contemporary scholars agree, "stemmed from a long train of racial abuses heaped upon the black community over the years."[93] African Americans present at the time, however young, were aware of this as well. One Thanksgiving evening, at Todd Stovall's father's house, I spoke with a family friend, Leon Verble, who was an eyewitness to the 1967 Rebellion. Over Thanksgiving collard greens and yams, Verble reflected.

"What was the cause of the '67 Rebellion?" I asked Verble.

"Police brutality," Verble responded immediately. A beat. "The same thing that's going to lead to it again if they don't do something about these police killing people—both black and whites," he continued. "In the inner city, like the president is talking about bringing back that stop and frisk, and

all that. . . . Won't work. It didn't work then, and it's not going to work now. People are tired of being abused by the authority. And that's what brought it about. Frustration. It was a hot summer. And it just boiled over. I don't condone any killings. I don't condone it on either side. Police or civilian."

Verble paused and thought for a moment. "But basically," he continued, "the curfew was at nine o'clock. And I wasn't coming home at nine o'clock! At nine o'clock I'd be way up on the east side somewhere partying with some friends." He chuckled. "All the major action was Twelfth Street and Linwood. It was really . . . The saddest thing I saw was when Hazelwood was on fire," Verble mused. "This was into the third day of the riots, as they want to call them. . . . The police were shooting up houses. . . . It was the police. And later on, they called in the 101st Airborne Division to help police the city. Which I had just gotten home from the 101st Airborne Division. I had just got out of the service . . ." Verble's voice trailed off.

Further reflecting on the personal irony of police brutality, Verble recalled a personal incident with the Detroit police. "We knew internally, that we were being abused," Verble said. "It was like I said—it was frustration. People were tired of being abused. I'll tell you an incident that happened before this. My wife and I were coming home. About three o'clock in the morning. We lived right off of Linwood Street. And that was when the STRESS officers were out covering the streets of Detroit."[94]

"What were the STRESS officers?" I asked.

"STRESS was a violent group of the Detroit Police Department," Verble replied. "They were like a tactical force, and they called them the STRESS officers." A beat. "So, we were walking. I had just parked my car in the parking lot, and we were walking around to the front of the building, and they were coming down the street. And this one black cop jumps out of the car and says, "'Nig***, you and that bi*** come here.'

"And I'm like, 'Hey man, this is my wife. And we're on our way home. We live here.' And he asked me, 'What you got in your pockets?' and all this.

"And I'm like, 'I don't have anything in my pockets.'

"And he asks me, 'You got any ID?'

"And I'm like, 'Yeah, I got ID but I'm not going to pull it out until you frisk me because I don't want to get shot in front of my house.' I've had some bad experiences with those people," Verble concluded. The warm and cozy smells of Thanksgiving dinner, and the soft buzz of holiday football behind us, contrasted with the stark discussion.

"Another thing . . ." he continued. "Well, as a young man, I called myself a nice dresser. And I had a brand-new car. But I was working eleven and

a half hours a day, seven days a week, at Ford Motor Company, to pay for it. And every time I would cross Woodward Avenue going east, the police would stop me for no reason. See, that was the kind of stuff that brought on the '67 riot. That happened before the riot. It was the cause. Although it made me angry at the time, I didn't act on my anger. But it was based on police brutality. They want to call '67 a riot. I don't call it a riot, because it was a response to years of violence. It was a rebellion," Verble concluded.

I sat in Todd Stovall's father's living room, considering the perfect alignment of scholarly accounts and Verble's account of the 1967 Rebellion. The '67 Rebellion was an act of resistance to geographic apartheid, police brutality, and legislated discrimination across every aspect of daily life. The '67 Rebellion was a loud, bold statement that business as usual, where African American lives were destroyed every day, would not continue. However, the destructive economic policies did continue, in the form of racist urban renewal programs in the late 1960s, with the continued goal to accumulate wealth by dispossessing others of resources.

Meanwhile, during the mid- to late 1960s, African American liberation and power movements continued to multiply in Detroit. Such movements took a variety of forms, from the shop floor, to the church, to the streets. In 1967, Rev. Albert B. Cleage Jr. renamed Detroit's Central Congregational Church as the Shrine of the Black Madonna, with the goal of "redefining Christianity and bringing the church in line with the political logic of black nationalism."[95] Whether or not a nationalist approach was reactionary, Rev. Cleage's rationales were—and remain—empirically sound. "Calling for community control of institutions in the inner city, as well as for self-determination in economics, politics, and, above all, religion, Cleage and his cohorts offered what they claimed was the only viable alternative to the 'moribund' framework of the post-WWII and Southern-based civil rights movement."[96]

At the center of Cleage's efforts in Detroit was a profound and necessary call for an African American liberation movement. Reverend Cleage's efforts vis-à-vis a radical church movement were mirrored on the shop floor. In May 1968, an African American organization of unified workers was formed at Chrysler Corporation's Hamtramck, Michigan, assembly plant, formerly known as Dodge Main.[97] The group was known as the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, or DRUM, and was focused on addressing, "in addition to the specific issues of [production] speedup and discrimination . . . black control of the local union and black control of Management, from the lowest to the highest echelons."[98] The Shrine of the Black Madonna and DRUM's sus-

tained efforts demonstrate African American Detroiters' relentless efforts to challenge destructive policy and legislation.

In the mid- to late twentieth century, the echoes of racist urban renewal, suburbanization of the automotive industry, racially restrictive real estate policies, and employment discrimination aligned with expansion of both licit and illicit pharmacological and psychoactive drug markets. Moreover, this expansion was also a direct result of simultaneous urban re/deindustrialization and geographic apartheid. Detroit became a textbook example of the phenomenon sweeping cities across the U.S., in which "urbanites dwell in troubled, often forgotten outposts, where the 1950s promise of industrialization became a 1980s 'junkyard of dreams' as Mike Davis calls it. In this wasteland, gangs package narcotics to stimulate the local economy, Sudhir Venkatesh has shown, taking it on themselves to bear the responsibility of job growth in government-neglected streets."[99]

In the case of Detroit, crack cocaine was the illicit drug of popular concern in the 1980s and 1990s. Crack cocaine's popularity—and status as epidemic—in majority African American neighborhoods across cities like Detroit, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and New York aligned with mass media obsession with the drug and its racist criminalization.[100] Moreover, the political-economic consequences of criminalizing crack cocaine use devastated people across low-income African American Detroit neighborhoods through familial destruction, punitive criminalization, explosive mass incarceration, violence, and death.[101]

The War on Drugs, first declared by Richard Nixon in a 1971 press conference in which he called drug use "public enemy number one," criminalized drug addiction and, in particular, criminalized people already in precarious geographic, racialized, political-economic positions versus the apparatus of the U.S. government.[102] The War on Drugs would continue through the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush years, with devastating consequences to the people the War on Drugs was designed to destroy: "By 1992, one in four young African-American males was in jail or prison or on probation or parole—more than were in higher education. . . . During the crack scare, the prison population more than doubled, largely because of the arrests of drug users and small dealers."[103]

The result of the War on Drugs? By 1992, the U.S. achieved an unfortunate title befitting a country built upon destruction and racist policing of African Americans and Native Americans during the Constitution's drafting—the highest incarceration rate in the world.[104] The glaring paradox of the crack cocaine epidemic and the War on Drugs was an

> ironic mixing of metaphors, or of diagnoses and remedies, when advocates for the War on Drugs described crack use as an epidemic or plague. Although such disease terminology was used to call attention to the consequences of crack use, most of the federal government's domestic responses have centered on using police to arrest users. Treatment and prevention have always received a far smaller proportion of total federal antidrug funding than police and prisons do as a means of handling the "epidemic." If crack use is primarily a crime problem, then terms like "wave" (as in crime wave) would be more fitting. But if this truly is an "epidemic"—a widespread disease—then police and prisons are the wrong remedy, and the victims of the epidemic should be offered treatment, public health programs, and social services.[105]

In the realm of licit drug markets, aggressive liquor marketing campaigns and geographic apartheid-suffocated commerce asserted the neighborhood liquor store and alcoholism as facts of everyday life.[106] Liquor stores and their proxies serve as hubs for licit and illicit drug transactions that enrich business owners.[107] In addition, the stores are reimagined as plazas by people in neighborhoods with no formal public plazas or squares.[108] Flashing forward through the War on Drugs' destruction of African American neighborhoods: mandatory minimums cause neighborhoods to be gutted and create a Prisocracy where millions of African Americans are incarcerated as companies profit from their destruction.[109]

In addition to illicit and licit drug markets, Detroit's racist urban renewal projects of the 1980s and 1990s gave way to waves of predatory residential mortgage loans—Detroit's residential foreclosure crisis—of the 2000s to the present.[110] In 2007, Detroit and Cleveland were tied for an unwanted title: the highest home loss rate in the country for subprime (typically low-income, working-class, African American and additional people of color) borrowers.[111] In 2015 it was reported that since 2005, more than one out of every three homes in Detroit had been foreclosed upon—139,699 of Detroit's 384,672 homes—due to mortgage defaults or unpaid taxes.[112]

African Americans were disproportionately harmed economically in the foreclosure crisis, with African American net wealth falling by 53 percent, to $12,124 as a result, versus a drop of 16 percent in European American median net wealth to $113,149.[113] The vast wealth gap—the consequence of economic disparities, fashioned and multiplied from the year 1526 to present, without redress to date—is only growing. Low-income African American Detroiters were pushed out of their homes and their wealth not only due

to foreclosures, but also due to threats upon a resource elemental to human life—water. Between March 1 and August 22, 2014, close to 20,000 Detroit households experienced an interruption in their water service.[114] In 2014 in total, 33,000 households had their water shut off. Detroit's Water and Sewerage Department, amid a municipal bankruptcy process and cash-strapped to cover $90 million in bad debt expense, devised a plan to generate cash. The plan: shut off the water in households owing $150 or more.[115]

The city's cash-generating strategies caused the most pain to its most vulnerable residents—children, elderly, and disabled people—while corporations and public entities owing six figures (including the city itself) in back bills failed to pay and the water continued to flow.[116] Since the 2014 mass shutoffs, Detroit's water crisis continues to unfold. In 2015, water shutoffs continued at a remarkable clip, with 23,200 new shutoffs. In 2016, 27,552 households lost water access, and in 2017, at least 17,665. In 2018, the city added 16,295 shutoffs, and in 2019, 23,473. All told, between 2014 and 2019, 141,000 Detroit households lost water access, nearly all of them black and low-income.[117] In March 2020, as the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) pandemic reached Michigan, under pressure from grassroots activists and church leaders, Michigan's governor Gretchen Whitmer announced plans to temporarily restore water services to all residents and to temporarily stop new shutoffs. However, the timing and the impact on the most vulnerable people is unclear.[118]

This long-overdue action seems late and self-interested. At least 141,000 black and low-income households have been at grave health risk due to lack of water services since 2014. This is a human rights crisis and a genocidal situation. However, antiblack violence in Detroit is so entrenched, and poor people's suffering so banalized, that it takes a viral pandemic for households to receive water. The insidious logic behind the public health pivot can't be ignored—now that sickness may travel unencumbered amid a pandemic, we suddenly find concern for a long-egregious situation.

Longtime grassroots activists in this city continue to advocate for the city's most vulnerable people, with groups like the Detroit Water Brigade, the Poor People's Campaign, and the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, dedicated grit-and-sweat-run groups, working against unjust policy ultimately designed to remove low-income African Americans from now-coveted real estate. Today, Detroit is over 82 percent African American, over 40 percent of households live below the poverty level, and outsized economic benefits flow to a small number of white and wealthy newcomers. Meanwhile, low-income Detroiters and African American Detroiters continue to be dis-

proportionately harmed by antiblack political and economic policy across education, housing, jobs, the legal system, food access, water access, and credit markets. In 1999, the first state takeover of Detroit Public Schools initiated the closing of more than two hundred public schools. During 2009–2011, under state-appointed emergency financial management, the school district lost more than twenty thousand students and closed fifty-nine schools, and its deficit ballooned to more than $284 million.[119] Today, the remaining 49,276 students try to learn in substandard conditions including derelict buildings, freezing temperatures, vermin infestations, teacher shortages, book shortages, and associated lack of engaging curricula.[120]

In 2017, white people constituted 10 percent of Detroit's population yet received disproportionate access to credit markets. Of 1,072 mortgages issued that year, the mathematical majority went to whites, in spite of the city's demographics. Moreover, in many city neighborhoods (139 census tracts in 2017) there were no mortgages issued at all.[121] Yet where black people did own homes, mortgage foreclosure rates across the nation were highest. Detroit was unfortunately emblematic of mortgage foreclosure's disproportionate impact on black people. Between 2013 and 2017, Detroit led the nation in reverse mortgage foreclosures (Chicago trailed in second place, even with four times Detroit's population).

A reverse mortgage allows borrowers to borrow money against their home at market value and to suspend mortgage payments temporarily. When the loan comes due, however, as a result of moving, a death, or a default, the entire balance becomes due, plus fees and interest. Of Detroit's 1,884 reverse mortgage foreclosures during that time frame, the foreclosure rate was six times higher in black neighborhoods than in predominately white ones, even at the same income level.[122] In 2020, a *Detroit News* investigation revealed that black Detroit homeowners were overtaxed at least $600 million after the city failed to adjust property values after the Great Recession.[123] Almost zero convenience and grocery stores are owned by black people, over 140,000 low-income and black households lost water services between 2014 and 2019, and between 2005 and 2015, there were at least 65,000 mortgage foreclosures completed in the city out of hundreds of thousands initiated, disproportionately impacting black households.[124]

In *LST*, my ethnographic and artistic agenda works to collapse (imagined) distance between onto-historical materialist formation of power, law, oppression, domination, and destruction. I work to reveal that "space, social justice, and urbanism are all initially viewed as topics in themselves which can be explored in abstraction—once it has been established what space is, once

it has been established what social justice is, then . . . we can proceed to the analysis of urbanism. . . . The recognition that these topics cannot be understood in isolation from each other and that the pervasive dualisms implicit in western thought cannot be bridged, only collapsed, leads to a simultaneous evolution of thought on all fronts."[125]

These days, you can smell money in downtown Detroit. The smell of money—the electric smell of filet mignon, the dank waft of craft cocktails blowing in your face with the frost-belt cold as you walk by a newly renovated downtown bar. Downtown Detroit smells like money. But just a few miles away, in McDougall-Hunt, the east-side neighborhood where Liquor Store Theatre unfolds, there is an odd smell of money.

On the scene of the liquor stores of McDougall-Hunt, as I film and hang out, I find that these stores are ATMs for the proprietors—and sites of gross inequality for neighborhood residents.

Spinning back to the present moment—let me bring you to the streets of Detroit's east side, to McDougall-Hunt. From 1526, we move to contemporary Detroit, where African Americans continue to live and to work against political-economic racism and legislation designed to destroy them. In *Liquor Store Theatre*, I'm toggling between the abstract, the smooth, the gritty, and the material in order to document, to historicize, and ultimately, to transform.

Introduction

FADE IN FROM WHITE:

EXT. GRATIOT LIQUOR—(DAY)—MEDIUM SHOT—A weathered, well-seasoned liquor store. It's steamy and sultry. The swirling air sings the promise of a months-long Detroit summer. My mind winds through the series of films I hope to make this summer, where I plan on coursing through this tiny little sliver of the United States in a neighborhood on Detroit's east side called McDougall-Hunt, staging performances and talking to people about city life. This thing will be called *Liquor Store Theatre*. This is all, at the moment, a forward-facing dream. I'm dreaming forward, willing concrete investigations to the surface of the street as I move. But today, warm sun presses down on a city scene.

The CAMERA PULLS BACK to a HANDHELD SHOT across a weather-faded, indigo-and-lemon façade with GRATIOT LIQUOR emblazoned in all caps across the store's awning. People walk across the streets and sidewalks around the small, modest liquor store; it's a typical midday on a summer Saturday, with soft, city bustle. The McDougall-Hunt neighborhood's bizarre blend of abundant nature, postindustrial buildings, and well-worn modernist architecture grabs you with its surreal swooshes of then, now, and future. In a quick PANNING MEDIUM SHOT, we get a sense of all these movements at once. Right away, the CAMERA PULLS BACK to a fatter ESTABLISHING SHOT of GRATIOT AVENUE in front of GRATIOT LIQUOR.

We're staring down the wings, into the backstage of Detroit, a Midwestern, postindustrial city with a population of approximately 700,000 people. Imagine a grit-shaded, broad city sidewalk, just at the edges of four lanes of traffic, streaming down either side of the street. In front of the store, here I

am, trembling-hot in the sunlight, eager to start this *Liquor Store Theatre*. All at once, I'm feeling the whirling of theory and thinking up against the rolling hum of practice under my feet.

The Moves

In *Liquor Store Theatre* (2014–ongoing), I stage and video record performances and conversations about city life in the streets, sidewalks, and parking lots surrounding the eight liquor stores in a neighborhood called McDougall-Hunt on Detroit's near east side. The resulting videos, equally depicting ethnographic encounters and contemporary art unfolding on the surface of the street, form a multivolume, thirty-plus-episode series. But the truth is that this book is all about the action before the *LST* cameras showed up and the action after the *LST* cameras were turned off, far beyond the scene of the liquor store and into everyday life in the zone.

After the cameras were turned off, I followed four of my willing neighbors into their lives in the McDougall-Hunt zone. These four individuals became what we call, in anthropological research, key informants. They included Greg Winters, a former long-haul truck driver whose family had owned a block of homes in the zone since the 1950s; Faygo Wolfson, an artist and sidewalk philosopher; Hector McGhee, a retired manufacturing worker and organic intellectual; and his nephew Zander McGhee, an aspiring college student.

During the time frame discussed in this book, in front of the *LST* cameras and beyond, my time with these four informants, and in particular Winters and Wolfson, modulated between deliberately thin-description encounters, scaffolded by anthropologist John Jackson in that "thick description, in a sense, has always been thin," and an affective approach to classical neighborhood ethnography, which anthropologist Kathleen C. Stewart described as locating "circuits and flows" of everyday life.[1]

Bracketing thick description with awareness of limits of knowing, I search out what anthropologist Clifford Geertz called the "informal logic of actual life."[2] Over the course of the many years discussed in this book, my key informants and I drank coffee together, smoked a square or two in the midst of heady conversations, talked and did math at kitchen tables, shot the breeze at bus stops, took photographs together, walked McDougall-Hunt countless times, went to performances and art openings, gardened, went to neighborhood meetings, made things, laughed, and cried, as they shared glimpses of their lives, and me of mine, in our own different ways.[3] It might come as a

surprise to those familiar with the *LST* video project that most of the ethnographic action occurred after the cameras were clicked off, and I orbited from the scene of the liquor store back into the neighborhood where I also lived and started collecting anthropological field notes in 2012.

The films and the fieldwork that followed after the *LST* cameras were switched off center on questions of contemporary cities and social life. What is the struggle for the city in Detroit? The right to the city, described by critical geographer David Harvey as the right to participate in the experiences, the resources, and the shaping of city life, is a poignant description of what it means to participate in city life.[4] But such participation isn't simply voluntary—it is structured, controlled, mediated, contingent, and offered or not, according to a society's policies, legislation, consolidation of wealth and resources, and practices. How, in Detroit, do people struggle for access to key resources, like quality education and employment opportunities, affordable housing, clean air, clean water, fresh produce and adequate nutrition, reliable public transit, and leisure, recreation, and green space amid the concrete grids and inequities of city life? How do people view, experience, shape, and reshape urban process? How do people shape their day-to-day, and through this, the city as a whole? McDougall-Hunt had much to say to all of these questions.

The Backdrop

McDougall-Hunt, a tiny little slice of Americana, just under half a square mile, with a population of approximately 1,000 people, is 95 percent African American and has a median per capita income estimated at $13,000.[5] The zone, bounded by Gratiot Avenue, Mack Avenue, Mt. Elliott Street, McDougall Street, and Vernor Highway, is two miles from downtown Detroit and the Detroit riverfront, and less than a mile from the Eastern Market neighborhood.

It's a precious little slice of the city that, at the time of this writing, seemed to float under the radar of glitz, redevelopment, and reindustrialization. It's a sprawling, postindustrial landscape of weather-faded modernist architecture, wide city sidewalks, funky urban cottages, and—above all—people who never ceased to challenge my assumptions. McDougall-Hunt is also the site of the Heidelberg Project, contemporary artist Tyree Guyton's sprawling installation of abandoned homes festooned with everyday objects like teddy bears, televisions, Barbie dolls, AM-FM radios, toilets, tires, and more (such objects are known as *readymades* in the art world). Since the late

I.1 Greg Winters, pictured with some of the Winters family property (2017).

I.2 Faygo Wolfson, pictured at *Liquor Store Theatre, Vol. 4, No. 7* (2017).

I.3 Hector McGhee and Zander McGhee, pictured with Fabiola Torralba and Maya Stovall, at *Liquor Store Theatre, Vol. 3, No. 5* (2016).

1980s, Guyton had been covering homes, including the home in which he grew up, with readymades and his paintings. Still, in spite of the rich neighborhood cultural life that the Heidelberg Project reflected, the economic figures of the zone were dire. And, while economic figures can't begin to explain the complexities of the people, the economics are, of course, worth a closer look.

At the latest census, at least 48 percent of citizens were living in poverty, and the rate of residents with mortgages was 19.4 percent, versus 36.1 percent across the city, indicating an even more stark economic picture in McDougall-Hunt. With a population density of 2,550 persons per square mile, McDougall-Hunt's density was far below Detroit proper's average of 4,878 persons per square mile. Think of New York City, with 28,256 per square mile, and San Francisco, with 18,440 per square mile.[6] It was clear that post–Rust Belt poverty had its arms around this slice of the city.[7] And yet the zone sang with complexities—for me, a salient approach to urban anthropological research needed to sing back with equal complexity.

Urban anthropological research has shifted considerably over the three centuries in which it has emerged formally through the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. From sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois's groundbreaking nineteenth-century mixed-methods study of urban African American life in Philadelphia, to anthropologists St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's analysis of raced and classed communities in Chicago on the heels of the Great Migration, to political philosopher Frantz Fanon's postcolonial analysis of revolution, psychoanalysis, dynamic psychiatry, anthropology, and ideology across France and Algeria, to anthropologist and writer Zora Neale Hurston's luxurious ethnography of African American folkloric traditions of her hometown of Eatonville, Florida, to anthropologist and choreographer Katherine Dunham's combination of praxis and ethnographic study of Haitian Vaudun, to poet Audre Lorde's gracefully painful poetry marking the feminist civil rights movements of 1960s New York City and beyond, to playwright August Wilson's works tracing contours of African American cultures across geographies, classes, and decades in the United States, an interest in performance and place imprints genealogies of urban anthropological research, as well as understandings of African diasporic cultural traditions and aesthetics.[8]

Building on this literature, I placed performance—in this case, a particular approach to the public making of conceptual art through choreography, ethnography, and moving image—in direct dialogue with the city. I was in search, as well, of a nuanced dialogue. I built upon works like anthropologist Laurence Ralph's urban ethnographic inquiry. On synthesis of theory and

method in fieldwork among gang groups and communities in urban Chicago, Ralph wrote, "After years of grappling with the sociology and anthropology literature on gang and community life, I decided that the most tenable approach was a concept of the past as an ambiguous space, as somewhere between history-as-registered and history-as-lived."[9]

Ralph's phenomenological interest in history's claims links to a critical question concerning Detroit—"Who decides which version of history will be told?"[10] Ralph's philosophical approach offers a point of departure. In deploying a contemporary, in-the-moment performance as prompt for conversation, I visually prioritized "history-as-lived" and invited people to respond to my visual prompt with their thoughts. In situating the conceptual art project on the street with a historiographic, political-economically contextualized rendering of the city, I offered "history-as-registered" as a necessary backdrop in an ethnographic analysis of the present. Ralph wrote, "The very composition of urban cities shifted, with increasing vehemence, starting in the 1960s, as businesses moved their investments from urban centers to the suburbs, and eventually overseas. Opportunities for illicit revenue blossomed just as opportunities in the legal labor market wilted."[11]

Spinning to conversations with people at *Liquor Store Theatre*, *Vol. 1, No. 3* (2014), Ralph's discussion of political-economic structure and its implications for social life rang particularly relevant. The CAMERA CUTS to a TIGHT SHOT of an attractive older woman, Fran Harper. Harper is wearing a mud-cloth African print dress, has smooth, gray hair, and a gentle smile. She's kind and witty, with punchlines at the ready. After viewing two takes of dance performances, she asks, "What are you doing here, sweetie?" After some explanation, Harper agreed to an interview and proceeded to give one of the most quoted and fascinating interviews of all of the films.

"My father bought the house in 1945. Right there on McDougall. You see, back then, the men, they basically worked in the factory. When your father worked in the factory, you didn't think you were poor, you see. I didn't think I was missing anything until I got to Cass Tech. . . . There, I met the children of doctors and lawyers."[12] Harper smiled. The CAMERA PULLS BACK and we see a summer late afternoon in full swing going on behind her. There are people of all ages, but mostly in their twenties and thirties, appearing to stock up on supplies for a party.

"My father said, 'What do they have?' I said, 'They got steak on the grill, Dad—and we have barbecue on the grill.' . . . My father said, 'Okay then . . . let's get some steak, and put it on the grill!'" Harper continued to describe her experiences in the McDougall-Hunt neighborhood over the years. "I went to

the University of Michigan and graduated in 1965. . . . One of my daughters moved out to California, one of them moved to Warren, Michigan, they're both good; and my son didn't do anything . . . because he didn't want to do anything." Harper's stoic demeanor wavered just a hair as she mentioned her son. She quickly righted herself and offered another signature, impeccably timed quip. "Now, what else do you want to ask me?" she volleyed. Harper's comments not only confirmed Ralph's historiographic analysis of the difficulties faced by urban African Americans across post-1960s U.S. cities, but Harper also cemented the structural supports of Ralph's interest in history-as-lived.

Harper's descriptions of her family's complex choreography in the neighborhood included fine-grained awareness of intracultural classed, political-economic differences, generations of property ownership, attendance at an elite public university, and a wide range of third-generation outcomes, including her adult children who were doing well and one who seemed to be struggling. Fran Harper's interview and Ralph's interest in who gets to tell the stories set the ethnographic and theoretical stage for my approach to urban anthropological research in this work. In the years after Harper's poignant conversation, Ralph's claim continued to resonate—it turned out that people were interested in telling their own stories on camera, and that many people (both in the neighborhood and around the world) were interested in hearing these stories. More and more, as I spoke to people on the streets and sidewalks, it seemed that after the cameras were clicked off, curious people would ask me a particular question.

People wanted to know—what was the typical conversation with someone on the street like? The answer was, there was no typical conversation. In fact, if anything was typical, it was surprise. Harper, for instance, shared in a few moments just a few of her family's connections and contradictions across generations. The desire to know what the typical conversation with one of my informants looked like, I considered, was a desire to get to what Jackson called "*the real* in (and in the intentions of) everyone around us."[13]

As Jackson theorized, one of the problems with our desire to get to a so-called real was the series of shortcuts it recruited and required. Jackson's "racial sincerity," rather, offered a revision to the flat notion of "authenticity . . . as an unbalanced relationship between the powerful seer and the impotently seen."[14] Racial sincerity, then, consolidated both a critique of racial authenticity and a critique of racial authenticity's critique, given that "critiques of racial authenticity may be anchored in the very same kind of objectifying and thingifying that they attempt to debunk."[15]

The CAMERA PULLS BACK to a MEDIUM SHOT of Fran Harper. The plastic palm trees and the persistent neon signs flicker in the bright midday sun as Harper describes her opinions on graffiti art in the city: "Some of the graffiti art is good, and some of it is not so good," she reflects. Moments later, Harper pivots seamlessly from art on the street to art in a white cube, expressing her hopes that the Detroit Institute of Arts would not be closing due to Detroit's municipal bankruptcy, from which the city had yet to emerge at the time.[16] Harper's nuanced discussions, and similar discussions that followed, reflected the complex subjectivity ethnographically and theoretically mined by Ralph and by Jackson. The racial sincerity analytic foregrounded an anthropological reality of confessing to not-knowing, as an essential element to knowing more.

Racial sincerity, then, offered a necessary speed bump to those seductive assumptions of which we're all guilty—think of a rhythm of banger; thug; queen; transient person; stoner. Of course, McDougall-Hunt's residents and passersby did not fit these seductive assumptions; there was no typical person nor typical interview. The analytic also presented a model for reading and understanding both subjective particularity and generality. From brief ethnographic encounters with informants such as Harper to extended ethnographic relationships with Winters, Wolfson, and the McGhees, this "granting of autonomy and interiorized validity" proved necessary as I listened to and documented the complexity of the day-to-day.[17]

The Contributions

This work is a critical theoretical and methodological intervention across disciplines including conceptual art, critical geography, critical race theory, political economy, and urban anthropology. Complicating an assumed hierarchy between artist/ethnographer and subject is at the center of these efforts. I began with performance as prompt—what I call a dancerly prompt—at the scene of the liquor store. With this prompt, I posed the question—how might I challenge what cultural theorist Stuart Hall called the received and rehearsed roles of people on the scene, including the anthropologist/artist and the informant/subject?[18]

That is, how might I trouble the assumption of a hierarchical relation between the anthropologist and the informant, where the anthropologist is the gazer and the informant is gazed upon? How might I challenge where contemporary art exists for viewing, who gets to view it, and who is

or isn't invited? How might I challenge power dynamics between artist/ethnographer and subjects?

Foregrounding the anthropologist's encounter with what feminist theorist Sarah Jane Cervenak named "philosophical wanderings," I prioritized the affect and desire of the day-to-day, the interiors of people's lives.[19] At the same time, I sought an ethnographic approach that could bridge the philosophical and the materialist, by uncovering the coded insights of daily life that pointed to political-economic, historical, legislated realities.[20] By beginning with perhaps bizarre, surreal performances outside liquor stores in the reportedly second most dangerous neighborhood in the United States, I challenged reductive ideas of low-income and black lives. I laid bare the question and investigated why, as critical geographer Katherine McKittrick wrote, "black bodies, rather than black people, are informing how we understand the production of space."[21] In the course of my meditation on life in the neighborhood, I came to some conclusions.

First, I developed an ontology for analyzing space and place, called the paradox of place. The paradox of place is an analytic consolidating the metaphysical, philosophical, and historical-materialist registers of places and spaces. In my approach to anthropological research and making art, I wanted to find new ways of thinking about space and place.

In other words, I wanted to touch and meditate on the contemporary; even shift it, while I documented and analyzed the subtlety, complexity, and the intricacies of human existence. The paradox of place, which ascended to the front of the camera and landed in my notebooks, is to be deployed as a way of thinking through personhood, power, access, resources, and nuance of urban process, centering the unseen, the subtle, and the insides of places and spaces. In addition to the theoretical intervention of paradox of place, I located particular findings in the McDougall-Hunt neighborhood.

I found that art, labor, and movement were the central forces people in the neighborhood deployed to move forward, to exist, and to meditate on the past, present, and future of city life. One day, a willowy, fresh-faced woman named Charlene Athens told me, "My art is black culture—I do hair. It's how I live." My theory of art in McDougall-Hunt was built on the foundational supports of Charlene Athens's words—her art was the black culture she drew upon, shaped, and reshaped each day, in her everyday life, as she worked to pay her bills and earn a fulfilling living doing hair. Faygo Wolfson, the artist and sidewalk philosopher, told me, "Someone has to stay here and do this work," as he described running errands for his older family members and making his art from items salvaged from the streets and sidewalks.

My theory of labor was supported by a Boggsist intersectional conception of philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's affective labor, reflected in Wolfson's commentary. I synthesized this intersectional affective labor as labor that landed beyond formalistic political-economic structures and labor that was inflected and/or attuned to classed, racialized, gendered, and sexualized structures.[22] In Wolfson's labor, there isn't formal capital structure, nor is money exchanged, yet Wolfson's labor is critical to life in the neighborhood—he helps family members and friends live another day. Likewise, Greg Winters had a mantra that resonated across the neighborhood—"keep it moving."

My theory of movement was built on the critical platform of Winters's mantra. I stitched the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari's notion of movement as an interrelated project of "becomings," "affects," and "perceptions" together with Greg Winters's words.[23] The resulting theory of movement is both visceral and wide-ranging. Whether it was moving a residence, moving to a new job, moving on to the next lawn to mow, moving to the next art project, or moving one's thinking, the people in the neighborhood, I found, were constantly moving. Although the people's apparent economic, housing, or educational status may not have moved, people were moving, always, to keep going forward, and to reshape their own subjectivities.

In other words, McDougall-Hunt was not what stereotypical assumptions might have held—it was not a place that could be boiled down to drug trade, gang affiliation, and late-capitalist, neoliberal decadence and decay. McDougall-Hunt was a glittering, contradictory, fascinating place of ideas, thoughts, words, hopes, and dreams. McDougall-Hunt emerged in this fieldwork as an artsy, postindustrial, funky urban neighborhood, and the people who made McDougall-Hunt move were equally complex.

McDougall-Hunt also emerged as economically distressed area in which people worked to mitigate monumental destructive economic forces like the residential housing tax foreclosure crisis, the mass water shutoff crisis, and forces of brutal urban process like escalating rents, evaporating jobs, and inadequate public transportation bus routes.[24] The people that studded this story were as complicated as anyone walking the planet, and their uses of art, labor, and movement as strategic forces in city life, to be described and analyzed in the pages that follow, evidenced their complexity. The McGhees, Winters, and Wolfson each provided ways of knowing art, labor, and movement in the zone, and beyond. I was interested in encircling the neighborhood and my informants in a global discussion of the politics of cities and the complexities of urban existence. My informants, with their stories and

ideas, made this easy—what they were theorizing and doing was in dialogue with the world.

From Performance to Choreography to Ethnography to Conceptual Art

When I refer to the term "performance," I am referring to conscious and unconscious actions happening from the sidewalk to the stage. In other words, I refer to performance as a broad concept, both consolidating and expanding notions of performance as art or performance as the actions of the everyday. My wide-ranging approach to theorizing and making performance rises from genealogies of critical anthropological performance studies and conceptual art frameworks.

Performance, in conceptual art frameworks, often deploys ethnographic method as a mode of researching and making. However, the location of ethnography in art world contexts, by anthropology's standards, including rigor, duration, and ethics, remains largely undefined. Simultaneously, anthropologists have a rich tradition of conducting ethnography in performance communities, as well as deploying performance as analytic toward investigating the everyday.

Ethnographer Marlon Bailey, for instance, deployed performance as ethnographic framework in his monograph, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit*.[25] In part drawing on performance theorist Dwight D. Conquergood's coperformative witnessing, Bailey's ethnography of the Detroit drag ball scene over the early to mid-2000s documented ballroom culture, and complex subjectivities, of people with a variety of racialized, classed, gendered, sexed, and sexualized social positionings in the drag ball scene.[26] Bailey was also concerned with the interiors of queer ballroom culture, ultimately producing a nuanced kinship analysis.

Bailey meditated on kinship in the drag ball scene, but in doing so he destabilized dominant narratives of what patriarchal, biological kinship structures can and should look like. Bailey didn't stop there. He also destabilized notions that alternative kinship structures were, a priori, free from oppressive ways of thinking, knowing, and being. Bailey could build an insider's ethnographic account of the drag ball scene because of his approach as an emic participant-observer ethnographer. In other words, Bailey extended and challenged coperformative witnessing, joining the scene, walking, talking, and listening alongside a variety of informants over the years. Anthropologist Deborah A. Thomas's ethnography of a Jamaican village just outside Kings-

ton likewise demonstrated an attention to performance. In Thomas's monograph, the performance of cultural identity was of particular importance.

Thomas, who in addition to her location as ethnographer was a dance artist and former performer with the acclaimed contemporary dance company Urban Bush Women, conducted fieldwork attuned to "popular cultural production and modern blackness in Jamaica."[27] Thomas's work reflected a sensitivity to the connection between "publicly hegemonic ideologies" of nation-states and institutions, and ways Jamaican people chose to perform their cultures and subjectivities.[28] Writing against an Enlightenment-kindled, nineteenth-century-sustained, and neoliberalism-fueled expectation of racialized respectability, Thomas documented critical, resistant performances across her fieldwork. Such critical performances are what Thomas called "modern blackness."[29]

Thomas wrote, "The modern blackness of late-twentieth century youth, then, is urban, migratory, based in youth-oriented popular culture and influenced by African American popular style. It is individualistic, radically consumerist, and 'ghetto feminist.'"[30]

Thomas's particular attention to the expression of complicated political-historical ideology through "cultural idioms and innovations" of "lower-class black Jamaicans" resulted in an ethnography requiring attention to the connection between popular culture, everyday life, and broad political-economic, sociocultural stances and structures.[31] From cultural festivals, to dance studios, to transnational migration, to collective and individual memories, to local and national policy and legislation, a particularly "unapologetic blackness" emerged from the performances, actions, speech acts, and musings of Thomas's informants.[32] Thomas's monograph contributes to the genealogy of performance-attuned anthropological and sociological research, and to this work in particular, through its dialogic attention to both the complex subjectivity of broad-spectrum black performances and the significance of broad-spectrum performances themselves in analyzing contemporary social life.

Shifting to the United States, anthropologist Elizabeth Chin's performance-sensitive ethnography of low-income and working-class African American youth is likewise attuned to a particular sort of consumerism that figured critically in Thomas's monograph. Chin's perspective as an anthropologist and a performing artist manifests in her critical, sophisticated analysis of her informant's formal and informal performances. Chin, at times, acts as what I shall call an ethnographic dramaturge, in complicated readings of her interlocutors' actions.

Chin's young girl informant, Tionna, implores from inside a car while driving with Chin, to another passing car (which was driven by a "blue-haired" white woman), "What are you looking at, white people?"[33] Chin deploys this statement as an analytic of positionality. Rather than a flat statement reflecting racialized binaries, Tionna's statement was meant for Chin, and meant as a support in Tionna's assertion of her own personhood. Chin proceeded with an ethnographic dramaturgical analysis of Tionna's prompt, writing, "'I know what you're thinking,' Tionna seemed to say, 'and I can be that person, but if you think that's me, you don't know what you're really looking at.' The challenge Tionna offered was to see beyond the act, to recognize her performance for what it was, an imitation of stereotypes held by others."[34]

Chin's analysis wasn't simply ethnographically dramaturgical but was also foregrounded with ethnographic subjectivity. Chin didn't assume she could accept her informant's actions at face value; moreover, Chin sought nuance and irony in everyday performances that produce and reproduce social life. Her work offers an invitation for ethnographers to consider their own location and extend such criticality to their ethnographic interlocutors. Chin also reflected on the limits of such a nuanced approach—from Tionna's prompt, to the responses of passersby, to ethnographer's participant observation. Chin mused, "The catch is, Tionna could be reasonably sure that only those familiar with her neighborhood as a community would be able to see through the put-on: people passing by in cars at thirty-five miles an hour are hardly likely to get the joke."[35]

Chin's car ride with Tionna and the motorist passing by are a metaphor for the possibilities, and challenges, of performance-attuned ethnographic research. Chin, in the driver's seat, has a particular location and view. Chin self-reflexively analyzes herself, her informants, and other people, including the woman driving by. Chin has a view that offers subjectivity to all on the scene—including the motorist who was thought by Tionna, perhaps, to represent a broader tone-deafness to complexities of black youth.

Broad-spectrum performance-attuned ethnographic research allows us to slow down the cars—continuing Chin and Tionna's drive—perhaps to pull up alongside the woman in the other car, perhaps asking Tionna to elaborate more on her "homey-er than thou" riff, perhaps pulling over, abandoning the cars altogether, and exploring these meanings.[36] Enriched by such performance-attuned sociological and anthropological research, I developed a theory of choreography as strategy.

When I use the word "choreography" in this work, I am referring to a theory of choreography as strategy—first, choreography as a way of making and analyzing sequences of actions and events. And second, choreography as a mode of making and analyzing all of the cultural, political-economic, and social movements contributing to continuous shifts the world over. Choreography as strategy, then, is both "the extension of Marx's concept of socialization to a widening range of practices" as well as a way of "find(ing) an analytical ground between incorporation and inscription, the bodily and the linguistic, historical subject, and agency."[37] In other words, choreography as strategy is a particular way of understanding sequences of choreographed actions within the scope of contemporary social life, contemporary art, urban anthropological research, political economy, and critical geography.

Classical critical geography theory refers frequently to art, dance, and performance metaphorically in discussions of city life.[38] Geographer Jane Jacobs described neighborhood life on New York City's Hudson Street as a "daily ballet"; geographer Henri Lefebvre described city spaces as contesting "the division between the everyday and the out-of-the-ordinary"; and geographer David Harvey described walking down a street as locating "works of art that ultimately have a mundane presence in absolute space and time."[39] Taking this to task, what might performance as prompt, what might conceptual art bring to studies of space, place, and cities? How might this approach expand on the work of ethnographers studying cities? How might this approach meditate on, and press into, contemporary artists' embrace and critique of studio practice, post–studio practice, white cube, and street?

Reflecting the large-scale questions looming here, performance theorists Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez note that "black performance theory is high stakes because it excavates the coded nuances as well as the complex spectacles within everyday acts."[40] In other words, as performance theorist André Lepecki writes, choreography as strategy refracts "political ontology . . . in relationship to representation and subjectivity."[41] I also took an interest in positionings of dance within performance studies, anthropology, and contemporary art.

Dance studies draws metaphors between the politics of concert dance and the relational politics of social life.[42] In the words of performance theorist Barbara Browning, the deeper meanings of performance are excavated through attention to, in addition to control of, musicality through syncopation, "another kind of suppression, which is racial, cultural, and political."[43] This way of reading dance as social-life analytic required specificity

and context, as Browning noted. Dance theorist Randy Martin described the complexity of dance as frame, writing, "the question of what dance does for politics cannot be answered a priori; its effects need to be specified in any given instance."[44] In other words, Martin argued that as context is articulated, "dance can be specified as that cultural practice which most forcefully displays how the body gets mobilized."[45]

Shifting from argument to philosophical inquiry, dance theorist Brenda Dixon Gottschild asked the billion-dollar art world question, "How much is the world of art beholden to acknowledge and deal with history and culture?"[46] I built on this analytical frame, casting postminimalist performance as prompt, beyond dance-specific proscenium and post-proscenium contexts, into the realm of the everyday, bracketed by the making of conceptual art and the ethnography of a neighborhood.

In this work, acts of performance and acts of dance were not modes of entertainment. Acts of performance and acts of dance, rather, were modes of thinking, modes of conceptualization, modes of inquiry, modes of theory and praxis, like a brushstroke across a canvas or an acrylic glass cube in the middle of a public square. And still, this way of working and thinking of medium in contemporary art contexts didn't obliterate medium itself. Rather, I worked in the space that art critic Rosalind E. Krauss described: "If such artists are 'inventing' their medium, they are resisting contemporary art's forgetting of how the medium undergirds the very possibilities of art."[47]

From Detroit to the World and Back

I wanted an analysis of Detroit to sing around the world for its ability to dialogue with the politics of space, place, and contemporary life. For anthropologist Li Zhang, questions of ownership and belonging bubbled up in her study of the regional city of Kunming, China.[48] Connections and contested figurings of space and place came into relief as Zhang traced dislocation and dispossession of Chinese construction laborers versus a burgeoning, gated-community Chinese middle class. With such political-economic forces at play, I considered Kunming, China, an interlocutor in my analysis of Detroit.

Zhang wrote of an after-the-rain morning in which she ventured along with her informants Mrs. Fong and Fong's son Fong Nian to see their soon-to-be-demolished family home. The home was to be replaced with brand-new commercial construction. The Fong family resisted. The Fongs were forced out after a months-long court battle, bracketed by encroaching con-

struction grit and relentless noise from the nearby construction sites. Zhang wrote, "The Fong case is just one of numerous conflicts over eviction, property rights, and relocation that have occurred during the spatial and social restructuring of Chinese cities."[49] It sounds as though Zhang is writing about Detroit, as much as Kunming. In Detroit, property rights loom large. As mentioned earlier, a *Detroit News* investigation in 2020 found that the city of Detroit overtaxed black homeowners by at least $600 million between 2010 and 2016 as a result of incorrect property assessments following the Great Recession. Many black homeowners are deeply in debt and/or have lost their homes as a result.

Back in China, for Zhang, across cities, "the rapid expansion of the real estate industry and the rise of the new middle class is not simply a matter of successful entrepreneurial endeavors or innocent consumption practices. It is also a matter of remaking urban spatial order and cultural distinctions between the relatively affluent and the less affluent through massive displacement."[50]

The question of spatial order continued its global tour, zooming back across the ocean to Los Angeles, California. Geographer Edward Soja's work in Los Angeles reflected, as Zhang's did in Kunming, the "obverse and perverse" interaction of developed and underdeveloped city spaces.[51] Soja described the situation of Los Angeles's marginalized populations as they were ideologically and materially erased from the city center. For Soja's Los Angeles, "underneath this semiotic blanket there remains an economic order, an instrumental nodal structure, an essentially exploitative spatial division of labor."[52] Soja's semiotic blanket was an obscuring force—a force that limited vision. A choreography as strategy that objectified and erased low-income people. For Soja, this blanket represented Los Angeles's brand as site of pure pleasure. For unadulterated pleasure to exist, as in the Detroit case, pain had to be administered, and then erased and dislocated. In other words, pain—or rather, the people who endured it for decades and more—had to be moved.

A collective forgetting or dislocation of pain shouldered by low-income Detroiters required a variety of strategies. Such strategies were distilled clearly by cultural theorist Rebecca Kinney. In *Beautiful Wasteland*, Kinney situated demography, cultural histories, political economy, and historiography that, together, mapped the city's shifts over the past half-century. One of the reports Kinney discussed was the *7.2 SQ MI* report, produced jointly in 2013 by certain nongovernmental organizations, companies, foundations, and quasi-private governmental groups.[53] This report concerned the area of downtown Detroit known as Greater Downtown. Greater Downtown re-

ferred to the 7.2-square-mile land area including neighborhoods surrounding downtown Detroit and downtown itself. The surrounding neighborhoods included New Center to the north, Rivertown to the south, Corktown to the west, and Belle Isle Park to the east. The 7.2-square-mile land area was just over 5 percent of the 139-square-mile land area of the city. However, the economic and ideological significance far outweighed the geographical. And so, the politics of demography, capital, and urban process were crystallized in this report.

Overall, the 7.2-square-mile report attempted to rebrand Detroit with an urban-corporate-light image. The report called the area diverse. However, the report celebrated African American people's departure and the demographic stagnation of Asian American, Hispanic American, and Latinx American people. Finally, the report celebrated European American people's increased numbers in Greater Downtown.

Kinney indicted the pathology of this logic, writing that the 7.2-square-mile report "plays on the prior narrative of Detroit's fall, to suggest that its rise will be possible when the population shift reverses, and the balance is tipped back toward a decrease of black people."[54]

The Detroitness of it all may seem to stud my writing here, but such ideological displacement was a global phenomenon. The ideological and material dispossession that Kinney analyzed in the 7.2-square-mile report jolted me daily as I read the news and sipped coffee. This ideological and material displacement assaulted my senses. Whether the ideas and actions were naive or deliberately racist did not make much difference.[55]

I continued to read such newspaper articles more and more, year after year as I documented on the streets and talked to people, and followed the lives of people of the zone, into people's homes and neighborhood meetings. I also analyzed and wrote about these newspaper articles that kept breaking my heart. I pushed through the extreme discomfort I felt in reading dehumanizing narratives about the people who I knew made the city tick every day.

Were we furthering inequality with projects that fail to reflect the historical context? Were we contributing to disparities by adding disparities onto an already economically distressed city? Were we furthering a mythical exoticism of low-income and black people, by sourcing cultural aesthetics from people excluded from funding opportunities? These were questions I asked through *Liquor Store Theatre* events, and that more broadly I asked concerning cities around the world. Detroit was a powerful case—but Detroit was not alone.

Because of the centrality of Detroit's mirror of underdevelopment and the reverse, I did not need theories specific to Detroit to think through my ideas; urban anthropological research around the country and the world was interested in documenting and analyzing political-economic, sociocultural struggle. Anthropologist Ida Susser condensed tensions of working-class people across Brooklyn's Greenpoint/Williamsburg zone during New York City's 1975–1978 fiscal crisis; Mitch Duneier traced masculinity, friendship, and racialized, classed tensions among people at Valois Restaurant in the shadows of the University of Chicago's Southside campus; Steven Gregory traced resistance among working-class and middle-class people of New York City's Queens County Corona neighborhood; Mary Patillo followed generations of working- and middle-class people through labor, kinship, and political economy, tracing upward and downward mobility in Chicago's Hyde Park zone; and Andrew D. Newman followed the lives of immigrant people of primarily African and Middle Eastern descent in suburban Paris as they worked to organize, resist, and create movements around a public park, Jardins d'Eole.[56]

I was stopped in my tracks by the works of anthropologists Zora Neale Hurston and Kathleen C. Stewart.[57] Both ethnographers traced affect and desire across the southern United States, meditating on the contours of place through political economy and cultural aesthetics. Both Stewart and Hurston wrote through and with culture—each anthropologist shook the complexities of their world into existence with words so rich that you could understand a pressing moment and centuries of history, and the irony of it all with a single image. Hurston and Stewart were ethnographers, and they were also artists, searching out old questions, while expressing those old questions in new forms.

For Hurston, in *Mules and Men*, the rich cultural traditions and aesthetics of her hometown were worth documenting. Hurston wrote, "I hurried back to Eatonville because I knew the town was full of material and I could get it without hurt, harm, or danger. As early as I could remember it was the habit of men folks particularly to gather on the store porch on evenings and swap stories. Even the women folks would stop and break a breath with them at times. As a child when I was sent down to Joe Clarke's store, I'd drag my leaving out as long as possible in order to hear more."[58]

Hurston, in the early 1930s, a freshly minted anthropologist and a writer, hung out in the spaces surrounding the convenience store in her neighborhood—populated by mostly men. In the throes of an early twentieth-century

world where most people did not have human rights, Hurston wrote her own path and documented her own culture with a stark brilliance. For Hurston, poetics of the streets and sidewalks were critical cultural documents to be observed, touched, documented, and launched for future generations to write their own freedom. I extend Hurston's work here.

In *Ordinary Affects*, Stewart traced social theory through the memories and the moments of the everyday across Appalachia and, at the same time, removed clumsy argument and bossy theorizing altogether from her decisive book. With writing so elegant that it forced theory into a corner and moved into the core of the reader's heart, Stewart, like Hurston, could gesture cultural revelations and stunning prose at once. On touching the everyday, Stewart wrote, "For some, the everyday is a process of going on until something happens, and then back to the going on. For others, one wrong move is all it takes. Worries swirl around bodies in the dark. People bottom out watching daytime television. Schedules are thrown up like scaffolding to handle work schedules and soccer practice or a husband quietly drinking himself to death in the living room."[59]

Like Hurston and Stewart, I wanted to connect the historical with glittering and fraught possibilities of the now. Aimee Meredith Cox's work brings us back to Detroit and the now. In Cox's ethnography of adolescent girls and young women in the twenty-first century, Cox traced racialized, gendered, and classed personhood as lived by her key informants at a Detroit shelter for young women.[60] An anthropologist and a previous member of Alvin Ailey's Ailey II dance company, Cox lived and worked at the shelter for years while conducting her research.

While Cox wrote that she did not begin with the intention of using dance as part of her ethnographic practice, ultimately performance broadly and dance in particular figured critically in her work. Where Cox began with a classical approach to unit-of-analysis Chicago School ethnography, her method became increasingly inflected with her perspective as a dance artist. The performance projects Cox initiated with her informants allowed a recentering of young women as complex subjects, spinning their personhood into brilliant relief.

Ultimately, making conceptual art on the streets spun me back into the neighborhood—back into the everyday, with people including Greg Winters, Faygo Wolfson, Hector McGhee, and Zander McGhee leading the way. My fascination with the everyday required a continuation of the ethnographic project after the *LST* cameras were turned off. *Liquor Store Theatre* consoli-

dated swirling streams of philosophy, history, contingency, and the real. In the chapters that follow, I work to locate the how in knowing and the how in making as key questions in anthropological and contemporary art theory, method, and practice. In the chapters that follow, I trace city life—pushing and meditating across streets, sidewalks, and frames. Let's go.

FADE TO WHITE

NOTES

Prologue

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21 Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), xix. "Maroons" refers to once-enslaved African Americans who escaped slavery and established independent communities on the frontier, at times linked with Native American communities (Aptheker, *Negro Slave Revolts*).
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31 Berry, *Black Resistance/White Law*, 6–7. The Fugitive Slave Clause required the return of escaped enslaved African American persons to the state from which the person escaped. It states, "No person held to service or labor in one state, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due" (U.S. Constitution, art. IV, § 2, cl. 3).
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Introduction

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