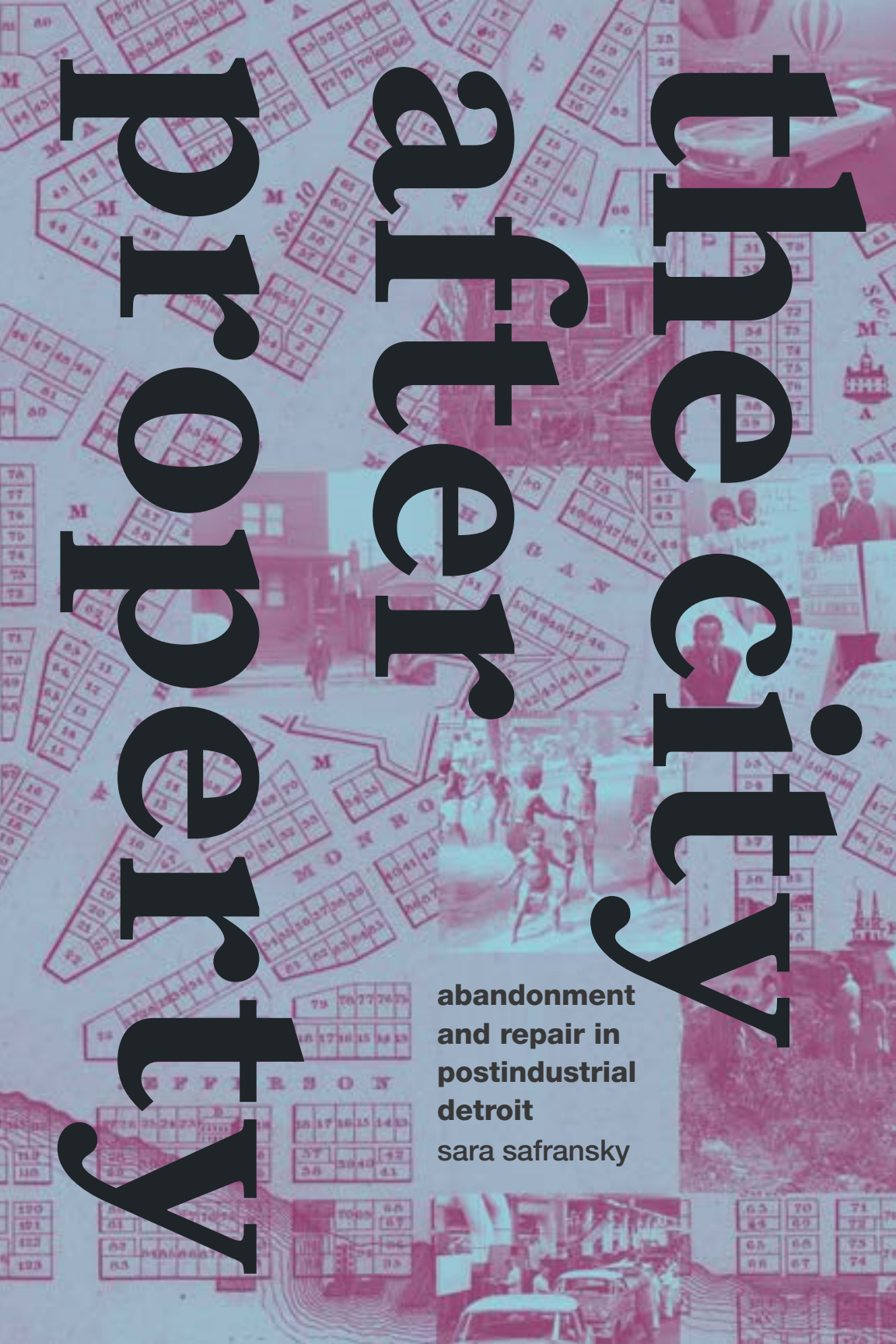
the city after property
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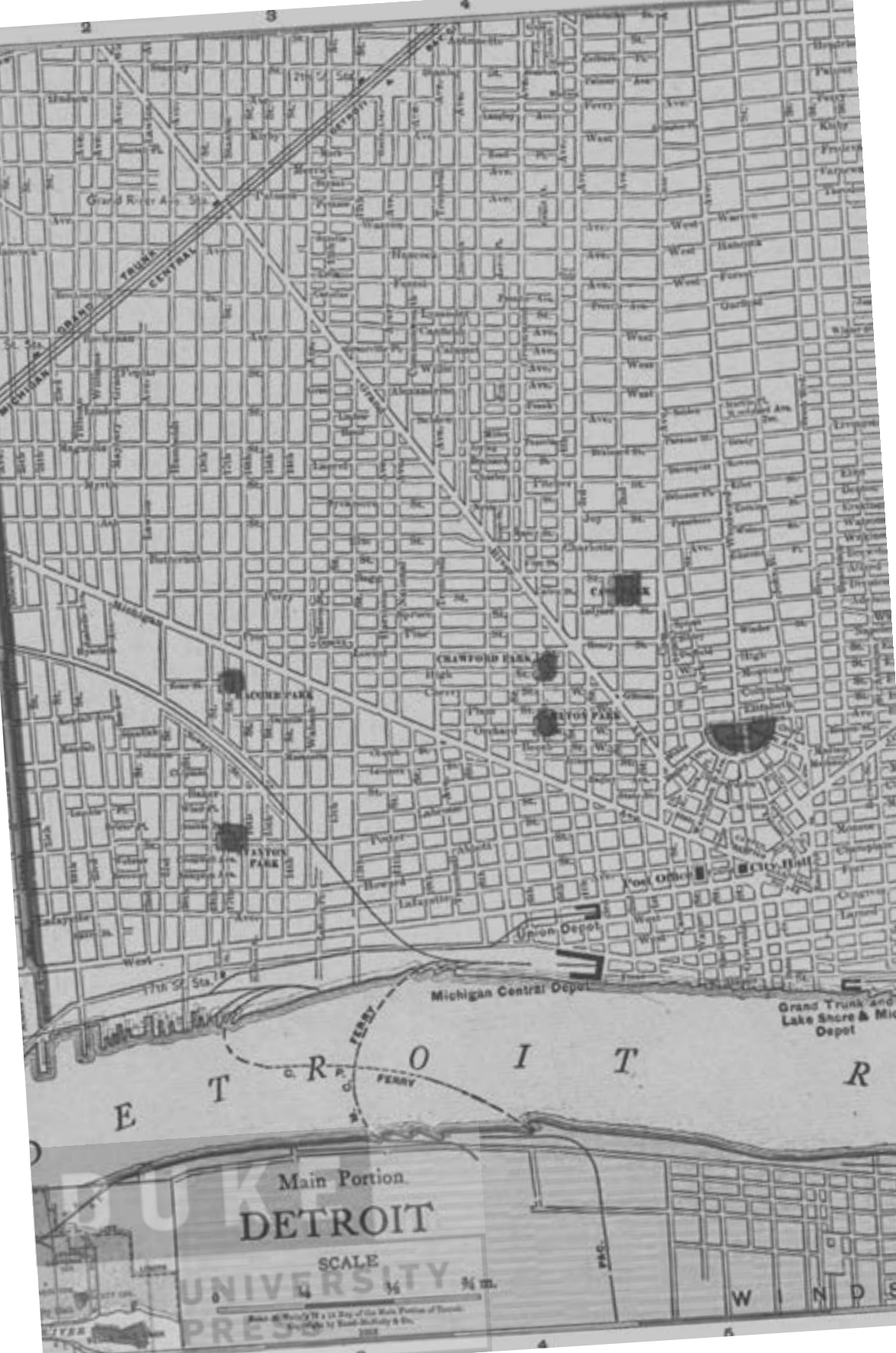
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Trumbull Park
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Sara Safransky

Abandonment and Repair
in Postindustrial Detroit

the city after property

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For Ashley, Eli, and June,
for Linda,
for beloved community

contents

abbreviations

AIM	American Indian Movement
ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
BPP	Black Panther Party
CDFI	Community Development Financial Institution
CLR	Community Legal Resources
CRA	Community Reinvestment Act
DBRTF	Detroit Blight Removal Task Force
DFC	Detroit Future City
DPD	Detroit Police Department
D-REM	Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management
DRUM	Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement
DWP	Detroit Works Project
DWSD	Detroit Water and Sewerage Department
FHA	Federal Housing Administration
GM	General Motors
HOLC	Home Owners' Loan Corporation
HOPE	Home Ownership Opportunities for People Everywhere
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
LRBW	League of Revolutionary Black Workers
MDTRC	Metropolitan Detroit Truth and Reconciliation Commission
MVA	Market Value Analysis
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAREB	National Association of Real Estate Boards
NDEDC	National Black Economic Development Conference
PA 123	Public Act 123
RECI	Riverfront East Congregation Initiative
RF	Reinvestment Fund
RNA	Republic of New Afrika
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
SOSAD	Save Our Sons and Daughters

TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UAW	United Auto Workers
UCHC	United Community Housing Coalition
URD	Urban Revitalization Demonstration
VA	Veterans Administration

acknowledgments

This book has taken a long time to write. Without the help and support I received from many people and places along the way, it would have taken far longer. Foremost, I am indebted to the insights and generosity of Detroiters. Many of the best ideas in this book come from them and rest on a long radical tradition of movement building. This book would be a very different one if not for the Uniting Detroiters project and for the mentorship and insight of Linda Campbell. I thank her for inviting me to collaborate and learn together. I'm grateful to Andrew Newman for the years we have spent thinking and writing together and to Tim Stallmann for joining us full spiritedly. Thanks to all those who contributed to the Uniting Detroiters project. A special thanks to those who assited with research and management and offered guidance, including Gregg Newsom, Jimmy Johnson, Ayana Rubio, Isra El-beshir, Jeremy Whiting, Emma Slager, Danielle Atkinson, Denis Sloan, Shea Howell, Shane Bernardo, Lottie Spady, Charity Hicks, and Heidi Bisson. Thanks to Baba Wayne Curtis and Mama Myrtle Thompson-Curtis of Feedom Freedom Growers, who generously opened their garden and home to strangers like me. Shea Howell and Monica White kindly took time to engage in conversation when this project was just the seed of an idea and provided encouragement. Jessi Quizar enriched my fieldwork through weekly dinners, lively discussion, and the Geographies of Justice reading group. In addition to Jessi, I am grateful for conversations with other scholars of Detroit, including Rebecca Kinney, Kimberley Kinder, Alesia Montgomery, Rae Baker, and Joshua Akers, and their collective expertise.

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I have finished this book because of Ashley Carse. Not only did he create time and space for me to write, but he also read (and listened to) every word, more than once. Our conversations and his editing acumen have made it far more readable than it ever would have been. While many have contributed to this book, and it is better for it, all errors and shortcomings are mine alone.

A final note, all future royalties made on this book will be donated to the Transforming Power Fund of Detroit.

prologue

The crowd spilled out of the Cobo Center convention hall in downtown Detroit where the US Social Forum was being held. It was a sunny day in June 2010. I maneuvered along the normally subdued street through a line of buses and people. The World Social Forum had been hosting annual meetings since 2001, but this was only the second domestic event. The event slogan, "Another World Is Possible / Another US Is Necessary / Another Detroit Is Happening," underscored the relevance of Detroit to the forum's aim of developing alternatives to neoliberal globalization. In the wake of the subprime mortgage crisis, with growing anxieties about the precarity of late capitalism, Detroit stood as ground zero for economic collapse. With its rich social movement history, it was seen as a good place to think about what it means to build another world and a new global Left.

I wasn't in Detroit that summer specifically to attend the Social Forum. I was a graduate student from North Carolina who had come to do exploratory research on land politics in the city. After decades of deindustrialization and white flight, officials classified more than 150,000 parcels of land as "abandoned" or "vacant." I was interested in what happens when a private property system fails and how people endeavor to put it back together or reorder it.

I had chosen Detroit as a research site for many of the same reasons the Social Forum picked it for its assembly. I thought Detroit might offer models for progressive land policy and more socially and ecologically just forms of urbanism. At the time, I mostly thought about this in terms of redistribution. It wasn't until later that I began to appreciate the deeply moral and ethical questions surrounding urban land and property. These were questions about race and personhood. They were about abandonment and belonging. They were about reckoning and healing. This book is about these questions.

No single narrative explains how these concerns took hold in me and drew me to Detroit. I wasn't from the city. Nor was my family. I grew up in

the Appalachian Mountains in the rural western corner of North Carolina, bordering Tennessee and Virginia. South-Central Appalachia and Detroit are very different places, though I would come to learn they shared some similarities and connections, not least of which was the migration of significant numbers of poor people from Appalachia to Detroit seeking work during the mid-twentieth century.

When I was young, property relations in my Appalachian *holler* materialized most memorably as "no trespassing" signs along roadways, hillsides, and, most surprisingly, tucked deep in the forest. I didn't understand the histories of race and power that these boundary objects signified. But I did sense a misapprehension in their possessive claims. To claim the woodlands as one's own seemed an act of folly—a madness born from the delusions of dominion that I am still seeking to understand. My rural all-white public primary school taught regional geography and history. We learned about Sir Walter Raleigh and the lost colony of Roanoke. We learned about the state bird (the red cardinal) and the state flower (the dogwood). But the history we learned barely acknowledged the most salient aspects that might have helped us understand our place in it.

This is to say, it left aside how race and property regimes established over centuries through colonialism, slavery, and capitalism facilitated the ownership of land and people. Despite the lore that there had been no slavery in the region—owing to its high elevation, steep slopes, narrow valleys, and distance from markets—slaveholders in my small county held almost four hundred people in bondage. The history we were taught left aside the fact that slave owners made up less than 7 percent of farmers but owned half the county's wealth; that by the mid-nineteenth century, a third of households had no real property; that the plantation aristocracy gave rise to divisions, sometimes between families, who ended up fighting on opposite sides of the Civil War; and that when men died at war, state law prohibited women from inheriting family property. We learned about the Trail of Tears and the civil rights movement but not how this history manifested locally in geographies of resistance, such as in Affrilachian freedmen settlements like the Hill or in Native resistors like the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who defied removal and refused to give up land.[1]

Such history of American race and property relations may have helped me better understand my own discomfort living in a place where white belonging was conferred by generations of settlement. When my mother, who was from the Northeast, relocated us to western North Carolina, we were considered outsiders from "off the mountain," as were my siblings who were born locally.

While I felt unease, I was ill equipped to understand how my ancestral lineage (Italian and Irish on my mother's side and Jewish Ukrainian and Russian on my father's) had enabled my family to assimilate into a regime of whiteness after immigrating to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, if less seamlessly into a rural version of it decades later. I sensed class differences among my classmates but didn't understand why regional poverty was so grueling.

The history I learned said nothing of the political-economic forces that drew an estimated seven million Appalachians northward from the 1940s to the 1960s along the mythic Hillbilly Highway, many recruited by Northern industrialists at a time when the mechanization of mining, timber, and agriculture had reduced already sparse job opportunities. My history books left aside working-class insurgencies like the Appalachian Mine Wars of the 1920s, the interracial solidarity efforts like the Young Patriots in the 1960s, and how 1970s' theories of domestic colonialism rooted in the Black Power movement had profound importance for explaining underdevelopment and extractivism in Appalachia. When in the 1980s, my middle-school playmates began professing allegiance to American-owned cars, I didn't understand how the uncertainty in Detroit's auto industry, Cold War anxieties, union conservatism, and a broader movement demobilization fostered by the rise of middle-class suburban life defined the terms of such loyalty.[2]

Decades later, when I arrived in Detroit, these connections were not yet on my mind, at least not consciously. Detroit first caught my attention because the city had been making headlines as an urban agriculture mecca. In the aughts, the growth of the local food movement gave rise to fervor over urban farming as a site to enact sustainable political change, though often in ways that skirted long-standing issues of racial and economic equity. Activists in Detroit were challenging the movement to confront and deal with these paradoxes and limitations. In graduate school, I'd been steeped in literature on agrarian land reform movements in Latin America and postsocialist property transformations in Europe. I found myself wondering how land and property questions were being adjudicated in a radically different context. It was an inquiry that took on a new sense of urgency as the subprime mortgage crisis tore across the country and globe.

My first summer in Detroit impressed on me the generous ways people were engaging in collective study and seeking to build capacious theories of liberation. I was introduced to a world of radical thought that led me to reappraise my own disciplinary training as a lapsed planner and then a geographer. I sensed that Detroit was not only a good place to think about the land

questions that preoccupied me but also a place to learn a version of American history I'd not learned in school.

Detroit, unlike Appalachia, occupies a central place in American history and mythology. I learned a version of Detroit's history that was intended to make sense of the American experience more generally—this was the history of the American dream, the melting pot, the might of industry—and later, in graduate school, the history of Fordism and post-Fordism. Yet as in my grammar school lessons, the margins of this history were elided. This book evolved from an attempt to think about land politics and battles over the future of urban America from these margins.

After the summer of the Social Forum, I returned to Detroit in the fall of 2011 for a year and a half of fieldwork. By then the city was inundated with journalists, documentarians, and researchers—myself among them. As redevelopment dollars poured into the city, there was also a sense of urgency around who was being left behind. Not only did many residents, activists, and city officials have to negotiate incessant requests for interviews, they were also facing the repercussions of how stories about the city's supposed renaissance were being told and who got to control the narrative. The saturation of outsiders studying and writing about Detroit forced me to grapple with important questions about why, for whom, and how to go about doing research, and particularly what it meant for me as a white woman from outside Detroit to try to do so in ways that were ethical, accountable, and, at best, potentially useful for the communities with whom I collaborated.

I set about meeting with activists to see if my research might connect with local organizing efforts. In conversations, community activists told me about their frustrations with "extractivist" journalism and research. They spoke of needing to defend against research and how the timelines of researchers were often at odds with community needs. Many expressed concerns about what was lost in translation, having stories told wrong, and never seeing what was written. One of the main concerns was about how the city's crisis was being analyzed, from whose perspective, and how the front lines of struggle were being covered.

As a result of how Detroit's story was being studied and narrated, some activists talked about developing models of research that empowered residents to share their own analyses and that benefited community work. They suggested that often the most necessary and urgent theory emerges from efforts to make sense of contemporary predicaments and better everyday life. This is a kind of theorizing that stems from lived experiences. It happens in meetings and study groups, in conversations on porches, while laboring in

gardens and on factory lines, and over shared meals. It happens as a matter of survival. It is the kind of theorizing that anchors radical traditions by both analyzing power and fortifying the imagination.[3]

Amid grappling with my position in this charged political landscape, I attended a conference, "Reimagining Work," sponsored by the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership. There I had a chance encounter with Linda Campbell that shaped my research trajectory in fundamental ways. Linda had been a community organizer in Detroit since the 1970s. At the time we met, she was the local director for a branch of a national organization called Building Movement.

When Linda and I struck up a conversation, she told me that she and her community partners were in the beginning stages of conceptualizing a project that would, on the one hand, elucidate significant political-economic changes in the city and, on the other hand, document and illuminate the work of progressive social justice and neighborhood-level groups pursuing alternative approaches to development. Linda had a no-nonsense approach and a healthy dose of skepticism about working with academics. During the HIV/AIDS crisis in Detroit, she had witnessed how academics came into communities of color and extracted information that enriched their knowledge and social standing but left the subjects of their research with nothing. At the same time, she was keenly aware that university resources could be leveraged for movement work.

In a series of meetings over several months, we discussed how my research might be strategically useful for and benefit from working on the landscape analysis. She invited Andrew Newman, an anthropology professor at Wayne State University, and me to be "learning partners" on the project. I always appreciated her naming us "learning partners" versus, for example, academic partners, because it suggested that we were learning together rather than academics providing expertise.

In the months and years that followed, Linda, Andy, and I talked about what it meant to coproduce knowledge across cultural and institutional borders and what types of analyses are useful for deepening on-the-ground struggles. We worked with other community activists to develop a participatory research project that came to be known as Uniting Detroiters. Its goals were to study and discuss the emerging development agenda in Detroit and how it fit into broader national and global trends, as well as to identify local challenges to and opportunities for transformative social change. The project aimed to use research activities to strengthen the infrastructure of the city's long-vibrant grassroots sector.

To this end, our research group, made up of activists, community leaders, scholars, students, and residents conducted interviews with individuals involved in social justice organizations and neighborhood groups. Our aim was to document and understand how Detroiters were analyzing and responding to urban restructuring. We approached the interviews as *one-on-ones*, a term used in community organizing that emphasizes identifying shared values, cultivating relationships, and fostering coalitions. As part of the project, we also hosted a series of workshops with the aim of creating a shared space in which to engage in collective analysis of the new conjuncture. The project yielded a documentary called *A People's Story of Detroit* and a book called *A People's Atlas of Detroit*, which together offer counternarratives of the city's redevelopment in the 2010s from the perspectives of residents on the front lines of struggle.[4]

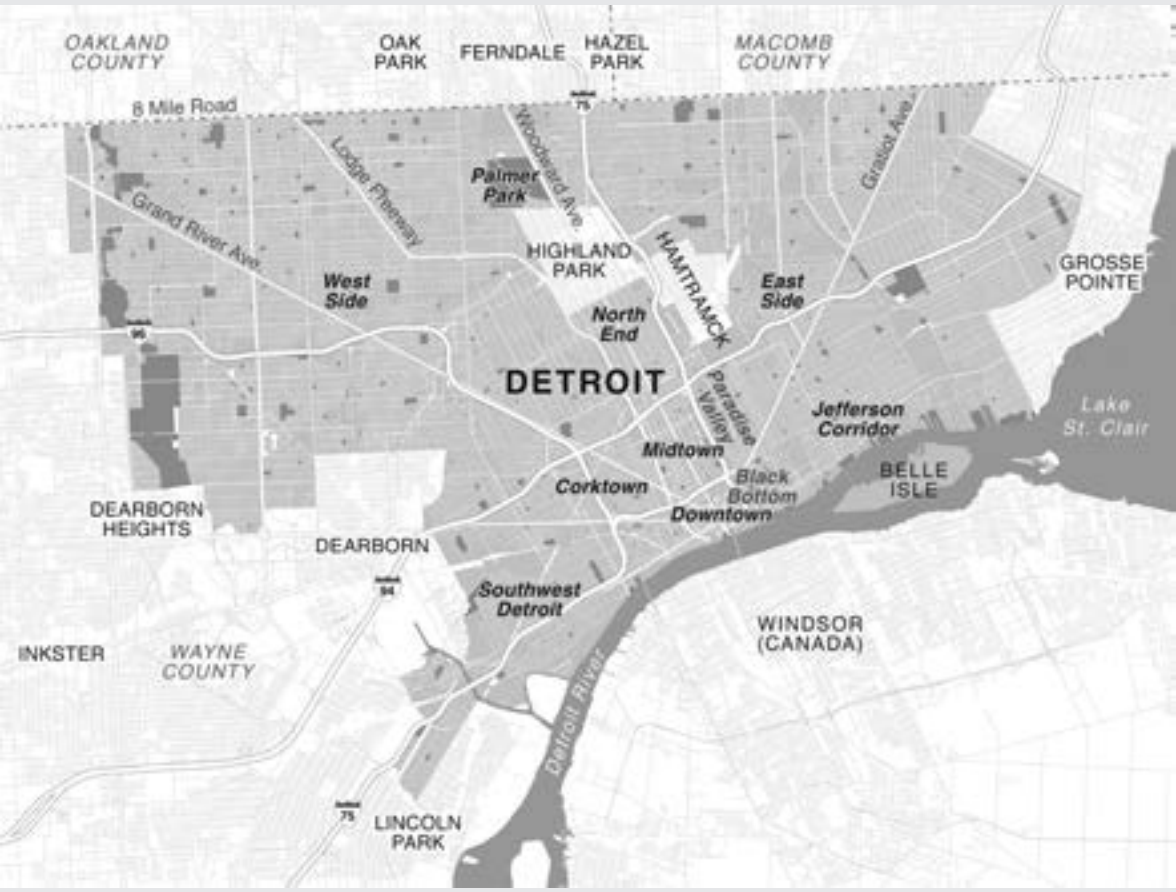
This book extends the collective research that we conducted as part of the Uniting Detroiters project by analyzing in more depth the land and property questions that pervaded Detroit's urban planning and development landscape in the early 2010s. I draw on a diverse archive of sources. These include interviews that I conducted about land governance and use with city officials, urban planners, nongovernmental professionals, urban farmers, city maintenance workers, and residents involved in neighborhood groups that cared for their communities. These oral accounts were enriched by observations at over sixty meetings, including planning charettes, city council meetings, municipal financial review board meetings, community land meetings, and activist gatherings. I supplemented these contemporary data sources with historical research on transformations in the city's property regimes drawn from secondary literature, newspapers, oral histories, and activist and community archives. Finally, I collected and analyzed media representations of Detroit from local, national, and international news outlets, documentaries and films, websites, and books to understand the language, stories, and images used to describe the city's landscape, stake a particular vision for its development, and justify possession of it. To gain a deeper understanding of the tensions that surrounded planning for the city's future, I juxtaposed the experiential attachments to land and political aspirations voiced by Detroiters with the spatial imaginaries and practices that showed up in policy and planning documents, audit reports, maps and plans, media accounts of events, regulatory acts, and development agreements.

As this book's title suggests, *The City after Property* delves into the past, but it is mostly a work of recent history. Writing recent history comes with possibilities and challenges. One has much material at one's fingertips but

less distance for reflection. The primary research and early writing for this book took place in the United States in the 2010s, a decade defined by the election of President Barack Obama and rapid technological advances. If heady optimism accompanied such "progress," it was betrayed by ballooning corporate profits, mounting ecological crisis, the rapid financialization of housing, brutal austerity measures, and ideological polarization that manifested in a rising tide of right-wing nationalism.

As I pen this prologue, ten years on, at the disorienting outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems we've reached a new moment of societal reckoning. The pandemic has brought into stark relief the limits and inequities of our political, economic, and health care systems. At the same time, it has given rise to a groundswell of social movements calling for alternatives—land and housing justice among them. In the summer of 2020, the massive uprisings for Black lives following the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor led to a new explosion of demands across the country to defund the police, take down white supremacist monuments, and decolonize curriculums. While protestors drew strong connections between anti-Black police violence and the violence of capitalist property relations, the mainstream media and feigned corporate attempts to unsettle America's racial hierarchy ignored them. Since then, a growing white racial backlash over perceived loss of power combined with a widening racial wealth gap suggest that the pandemic will come and go, but enduring questions about how to come together to build a more dignified and just world—and the crucial role of decommodifying land and social relationships therein—will remain. This book is a humble offering to these conversations.

Map 1 | This map of Michigan and its environs situates Detroit in regional context. It shows that Detroit, named Waawiiyaatanong by the Anishinaabe, occupies stolen land and is governed by the 1807 Treaty of Detroit between the United States and the Odawa, Ojibwe, Wyandot, and Potawatomi Nations. Other major treaties with the United States are represented by year and signing tribes. *Source:* Tim Stallmann.



Map 2 | Detroit Metropolitan Area. *Source:* Tim Stallmann.

Figure 1.1 (opposite) | This 2016 aerial image depicts a portion of Detroit. Downtown is shown at the center, and the Ambassador Bridge is center left. A barge cruises down the Detroit River, which separates the city from Windsor, Canada, the land mass to the south. *Source:* Planet Labs, August 22, 2016.

Figure 1.2 | "They tried to buy us. They didn't know we were seeds," reads a mural by Brandan "BMike" Odums and Rick Williams at Eastern Market in Detroit. *Source:* Photo by wiredforlego, September 17, 2018, Flicker.com.

unbuilding a city 1

It was a quiet street. A meadow undulated in the breeze. Before the grass pushed through the concrete and erased visible markers of the property grid, streets like this were lined with the modest homes of Detroit autoworkers. This was more than a half century ago, before factory automation started to eliminate jobs, and the Big Three—Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors—started to relocate their factories down South and overseas. It was before the suburbs began to sprout up on the surrounding Michigan farmland, before the city went up in flames. It was before the exodus of white Detroiters, before one of the nation's largest cities became majority Black and too big for itself, before planners began to ask: How do you unbuild a city?

In the autumn of 2011, I moved to Detroit seeking answers to this question. It was a pivotal moment. The city that put the world on wheels had become a laboratory for postindustrial futures and a dramatic reterritorialization was underway. Reeling from the Great Recession, Detroit was on the precipice of emergency financial management and municipal bankruptcy. The Motor City, which once boasted almost 2 million residents, had grappled with depopulation since the 1950s, when the postwar exodus to the suburbs began. As white people filled the suburbs around an increasingly Black city, Detroit became a site of persistent racialized poverty and a skeleton of its midcentury self. Officials classified a staggering 150,000 lots—more than a third of the city—as "vacant" or "abandoned."

Vociferous debates ensued over the city's budgetary challenges, austerity measures, and how to respond to the problem of too much land. It was, in

short, a time of chaos at all levels of city government and of extreme uncertainty for residents. City officials had been working aggressively to attract inhabitants and transnational capital to the city. New public-private partnerships and philanthropic initiatives aimed to address the city's land problem through policies that focused on the acquisition, disposition, demolition, and regularization of the city's vacant properties.

The most sweeping initiative, launched by then-mayor David Bing, was a planning process called the Detroit Works Project that sought to fix the city's spatial mismatch by radically reconfiguring—or "rightsizing"—its urban footprint to match its smaller population. Controversially, it proposed stabilizing real estate markets by decommissioning some depopulated neighborhoods. In practice, this meant retracting public services (garbage pickup, transportation, water) and installing landscape features like wetlands, retention ponds, farms, forests, and greenways. Within this blue and green infrastructure paradigm, entrepreneurs began to envision Detroit's abandoned lots as sites for large-scale commercial food, fuel, and fiber production.

The unprecedented scale of the land crisis grabbed media headlines as an overwhelmed city government sought to offload property and housing at rock bottom prices. Meanwhile, a motley group of actors came out of the woodwork, proposing new ways to solve or exploit the city's surplus land problem. They often sought different political and economic ends. Schemes included a twenty-first-century homesteading program, an immigrant resettlement plan, developing a zombie theme park, and turning an iconic island park into an independent commonwealth and tax haven, among others. One investor even launched a billboard campaign in New York City that encouraged Brooklynites to move "west of Bushwick" to Detroit.[1]

In this context, a paradox emerged: government officials, planners, and the media characterized Detroit's land problem in terms of overabundance (too much vacant land and too little demand). At the same time, many residents faced foreclosures and evictions, which further increased the supply. They also faced barriers to gaining ownership over vacant de facto public land. The situation on the ground was complicated. Many property parcels were not actually "abandoned" or "vacant" but existed in liminal or contested states of ownership, characterized by foreclosure and eviction defenses, cloudy titles, squatting, and efforts to "take back" the land. For decades, residents had been mowing and maintaining city blocks, cleaning streets, fixing up and living in old buildings, and transforming unused lots into urban gardens

on a scale unmatched in any other American city. This caretaking led to a widespread sense of collective ownership over de facto public lands poised for repurposing and privatization under planned shrinkage.

This paradox is at the heart of the empirical and ethical questions explored in this book: Why did the city have so much land when so many residents had so little? To whom did Detroit's "vacant" and "abandoned" lands belong? Whose land claims were validated by existing legal and juridical frameworks? Whose were not? Why? Could those frameworks be reformed? Was reform even the answer? How did competing notions of repair undergird land claims and portend different urban futures? And the more rudimentary if far from straightforward question: How had Detroit found itself in this situation?

Detroit's abandonment is often presented as a story of industrial decline, suburbanization, and white flight. And Detroit as *the* abandoned place is characterized by lack, absence, and inactivity.[2] As I talked to residents, activists, planners, and government officials, however, I realized this framing of abandonment reified the notion of surplus land and concealed the systematic abuses of power and arbitrary rules that produced scarcity. The enormous land questions facing postindustrial cities like Detroit are often approached as problems of depopulation and failed property markets that require technical fixes. Yet a reframing of the problem suggests different avenues for what is to be done in response. To better understand the visions, tensions, passionate responses, and complex questions of justice that arose as plans unfolded to unbuild and redevelop Detroit, I realized the very idea of "abandoned" land needed rethinking.

The City after Property takes the reader on a journey into the everyday land and property struggles that emerged over the city's so-called abandoned lands as planners, policy makers, and residents, among other actors, sought to reimagine Detroit. Debates were about use, distribution, and much more. Detroit's lands, even "abandoned" lands, were imbued with powerful memories, fears, aspirations, and visions for alternative futures. Efforts to unbuild Detroit, thus, upturned not only material detritus but also complex relationships of land, property, and race that often remained hidden from view.

Throughout the book, I argue that access to land is mediated by property formations that are cultural, racialized, historical, and contested. As this suggests, if we want to understand abandonment, we must get beyond seeing property as simply a thing (i.e., the land itself) that one owns and interrogate it as a political construct, an ideology, and a moral force that shapes selves and worlds. In other words, we must ask what comes *after property*?

A Laboratory for Postindustrial Futures

Narratives of abandonment can shape how urban problems are conceptualized and how solutions are imagined. When I started this project, there were three well-rehearsed explanations of Detroit's decline. The first and most widely circulating of these emphasized how the invisible hand of global capital and shifts in the political economy of the auto industry had emptied out the city. A second overtly racist narrative pinned Detroit's demise on Black cultural pathologies, the ineptitude and corruption of the Black municipal government, and a pervasive lawlessness that gripped the city.

In the early 2000s, new narratives began to emerge. Propagated by filmmakers, photographers, journalists, and tourists, they cast Detroit as empty, wasted, and underutilized. The iconic images of the abandoned factory as representative of the Motor City's working-class, industrial aesthetics came to compete with a potent new imaginary of "urban wilderness": houses ensnarled in vines (so-called feral houses), trees sprouting from the tops of deserted skyscrapers, dense groves of invasive Chinese "ghetto palms," and wildlife sightings. It was a landscape altered by but notably absent of humans. Rarely did the documentarians of these haunting and, at times, beautiful landscapes inquire into the historical conditions of their production.[3]

Detroit had long been called "America's wasteland" and its "most dramatically depopulated city," but it was not alone in its plight. Buffalo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis, to name only a few cities, had all been in population decline since their industrial heydays, confounding planning models impelled by growth prerogatives. Policy makers commonly wrote off Detroit and other postindustrial cities as beyond salvation.

But something shifted at the turn of the century as millennial cultural fixation on end-time narratives and fantasies of renewal reached new heights. Now, in spite of (or, perhaps, because of) their myriad problems, many planners, policy makers, and publics began seeing Detroit and other cities with copious amounts of vacant land as exciting testing grounds for experimental urban futures within the context of collapse.

Detroit was no stranger to crisis, but the Great Recession of 2007–2009 served up its own unique hell. As foreclosures combined with welfare cuts, job losses, and relentless cutbacks in public education, the city hemorrhaged residents. Detroit had faced steady depopulation for a half century, but between 2000 and 2010 alone, the city lost an additional 25 percent of its residents. The loss reduced its population to 713,000, over 80 percent of whom

identified as African American. Of the working-age residents who remained in the city, half were unemployed.[4]

Throughout history, cities have experienced booms and busts, even total population collapses. Their ruins—from Machu Picchu to the Acropolis—have long served as sites of contemplation on the ephemerality of civilizations. Postindustrial cities were just the latest sites of ruination. When the public fixed their gaze on Detroit, it was not just to imagine new futures but also to process or deflect generalized anxiety about the precarity of and experiences of dislocation that accompanied late capitalism.

Where better to grapple with the uncertainty that followed the fallout of the subprime foreclosure crisis than Detroit, the birthplace of Fordism and Fordist decline? Fordism was always more than an economic model of standardized production for Model Ts. It standardized an entire way of life and promised increased prosperity for all. Communities suffered stunning job losses with Fordist decline. Less noted, though, perhaps, even more devastating was the loss of social and political infrastructures propped up by union power.[5] Fordist prosperity did not simply come from mass production but was indelibly tied to unions, which exerted pressure on company management and the public sector to live up to a social contract that distributed the benefits of growth. Given that Detroit has long symbolized the promise and failure of this American dream, it is unsurprising that it emerged as a key site for rumination on the end times of industrial capitalism, the dangers of financialization, and the sustainability of our collective future.

Debates over post-Fordist and postindustrial futures have long conjured nostalgia, resentments, hopes, and worries over the future of work. Deep anxieties animate discussions of what should become of cities once booming with industry in the wake of factory closures, union busting, free-trade agreements, outmigration, and the rise of the information economy. In the 1960s, the concept of *postindustrial society* named societal transformations taking place because of cybernation and automation. The term captured concerns about impending economic obsolescence, on the one hand, and a rising leisure class, on the other.[6] By the 2010s, debates over the future of postindustrial cities continued to turn on concerns about technology and work. As Detroit illustrates, however, these debates were also bound up with questions about how and for whom to repurpose urban land and infrastructure, as cities reorganized in response to the logics of finance capital and the uncertainties wrought by climate change.

After the precipitous stock market collapse of September 2008, Detroit began to generate headlines as a cautionary tale of where other cities might be headed. As the executives of the Big Three automakers groveled in Washington for a relief package and General Motors declared bankruptcy, one longtime Detroit-based journalist explained, "I began to get calls from reporters around the world wondering if the Rust Belt cancer had metastasized and was creeping to Los Angeles and London and Barcelona. Was Detroit an outlier or an epicenter?"[7]

Analysts struggled to make sense of the economic fallout and late capitalism's malfunctions. Consider the former Federal Reserve chair Alan Greenspan's bewildered concession that the global financial crisis had revealed a "flaw" in free-market ideology. In this context, the fixation on Detroit is best understood as dissociative.[8] This is to say, the blank beauty of the city's expansive ruins and narratives of decline were nonreferential to reality. They represented capital while disappearing it, engaging in a form of obfuscation that mirrored that of global finance capital's own detachments and abstract violence.

The media maelstrom fed on itself, invigorating global interest in postindustrial cities as sites from which to reconceptualize urbanization and the economy. The ascendant notion that distressed cities built to support larger populations and bygone industries—like Flint, Leipzig, Turin, and Osaka—could be productively shrunk was not new. It rehabilitated old, largely discredited ideas of "planned shrinkage" from the 1970s, when ill-conceived efforts to clear urban neighborhoods led to the relocation of residents in the name of renewal.[9] The idea was expressed most fully as policy by New York City housing commissioner Roger Starr. There, planned shrinkage led to the reduction in fire services, much of the South Bronx going up in flames (as well as other parts of the city), and the subsequent withdrawal of services from "sick" neighborhoods that were poor and nonwhite.[10]

If shrinkage was a qualified disaster forty years earlier, the theory had newfound luster in the early 2000s. Shrinking cities—cities that faced a mismatch between their spatial footprints and populations because of processes of deindustrialization and demographic transition—had long been written off by planners and policy makers. But by the early 2010s, they'd begun to embrace them as exciting opportunities to radically reimagine the urban form, particularly leaner, greener templates for an era of planning defined by the dual mandates of austerity and sustainability. The green city, once a fringe idea that conveyed alternative visions for society, began to blossom in the sunshine of a neoliberal economic order.[11]

The demands of growth had long dominated American urban planning. Planned shrinkage was, ironically, no different. Its corollaries were models of corporate restructuring and downsizing. Cast in this light, shrinkage was an opportunity to experiment with unbuilding, retrofitting, reuse, and repair as a means of capitalist urban growth.[12] The public's fascination with shrinking cities has been tempered somewhat since the Great Recession; however, efforts to reimagine the urban form continue to shape old industrial communities—through plans, policies, and projects—in ways that remain poorly understood.

Rethinking Abandonment with Detroiters

Many books have been written about Detroit. The city has been a key case for studies of industrial capitalism, unions, Black politics, the Black Power movement, Black theology, and whiteness and racial identity.[13] Urban studies scholars, in particular, have turned to Detroit to investigate the racialization of housing and urban development.[14] Few works, though, have attended to how property and land politics have evolved in the context of increased financialization, planned shrinkage, and sustainability mandates. Abandonment too has remained undertheorized, particularly given its prominence in narratives of postindustrial decline.[15]

When I began studying Detroit, it seemed necessary to both reread abandonment narratives and center land and property relations in the story. *The City after Property* forwards three arguments related to these concerns. First, I argue that to more fully address the politics of disposability that pervades urban life, neoliberal urbanism must be analyzed as part of a longer evolution of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and slavery. Second, I argue for greater attention to how discourses of abandonment shape urban planning and governance decisions. Finally, I argue that land struggles should be taken as important sites of scholarly inquiry because they illuminate how modern property organizes abandonment as well as alternative ways of conceiving of personhood, rights, nature, and sovereignty. I'll return to these three areas. Before I do so, I explain how conversations with Detroiters made me realize that both property and abandonment needed more analytical attention in urban studies.

Urban studies scholars often explain Rust Belt places in terms of postindustrialism—and the cognate processes it denotes, deindustrialization and suburbanization. Scholars of political economy have offered associated

analytics—from urban metabolism to global flows, the spatial fix, networked urbanism, and planetary urbanization—to illuminate how, for example, capital flows through the built environment to realize surplus value and how infrastructural networks constitute the material and social fabric of the city. Meanwhile, scholars have drawn attention to shifts in the mode of capitalism from a system based primarily on deriving profit from the discipline of labor (e.g., through automation in Detroit's factories) to one based on deriving profit from debt and rent (e.g., through subprime mortgages, the fringe economy, and the rentier economy).[16]

Such political-economic analyses are critical for making sense of urban change and pressing societal challenges. Indeed, the unprecedented financialization of real estate markets illuminates the speculative, predatory, and parasitic nature of late capitalism and helps explain why gentrification has become a household term. Yet, crucially, the land and property struggles I encountered on the ground in Detroit often exceeded the explanatory power of such categories, analytics, and temporalities.

Political-economic analyses of postindustrial decline tend to take twentieth-century industry and its absence as a baseline reference point. In doing so, they elide the longer histories of imperialism and colonialism that condition distributions of power and forces of exclusion and appropriation in both the industrial and the postindustrial eras. Put another way, they foreclose a deeper interrogation of abandonment, failing to see it for what it is—a social relationship and racialized project bound up with property—and, thus, are unable to adequately address either the worldviews and systems that hold it in place or the movements that emerge to counter it. These dynamics begged a question of how I might better account for tense and tender struggles taking place over Detroit's "abandoned" lands.

As mentioned above, the notion that Detroit was abandoned—read almost exclusively as empty—pervaded popular and academic narratives. Yet when longtime Detroit residents of different backgrounds talked with me about the city, they described a landscape that was not empty but densely "storied," to use Mishuana Goeman's term.[17] They emphasized what Detroit had once been and the hopes that people invested in the city. They described a place where one could find work and join the middle class, a bastion of Black homeownership, Motown, America's largest Black city, a key center for Black radical and labor movements.

Residents and community activists talked about abandonment in ways that were qualitatively different from planners' landscape typologies. Crucially, they were more likely to foreground loss than emptiness. As sociologist

Alesia Montgomery has observed, through sounds, scents, tastes, and feelings, they conjured a place that once was and that could still be.[18] They continually made the claim that Detroit's crisis was less about abandoned lots than about the abandonment of *people*, casting light on the profound distortions of Blackness and Black aspatiality on which popular representations of the city rested.

In contrast to popular narratives that blamed Detroit's decline on corruption, irresponsible actors, and faceless political-economic forces, residents were quick to explain that it was more local and systematic. It was state-sanctioned violence and racist housing policies. It was planning. It was urban renewal. Relentless policing. These ongoing processes—rooted in an apartheid past—had taken on new formations like subprime mortgage foreclosures, urban shrinkage, "rightsizing," strategic renewal, and green redevelopment that linked Detroit's predicament to other places.

Indeed, by the early 2010s, post-Katrina New Orleans had become a key analog for Detroit. Planners and policy makers likened Detroit's half-century-long process of depopulation to a "slow motion Katrina."[19] The juxtaposition of the shock of natural disaster with Detroit's slow industrial decline—accelerated by the jolt of the recession—painted a picture of two cities struck by the vagaries of nature. This framing masked how predicaments facing New Orleans and Detroit were caused not by the exceptional forces of nature but by human decisions. As Andy Horowitz writes in a history of Katrina, "Somebody had to build the levees before they could break."[20]

The comparison between Detroit and New Orleans was more than metaphorical.[21] Planners, researchers, and policy makers traveled between the two cities. They exchanged ideas about how to manage problems associated with shrinkage and compared data. Notably, the variables they deemed comparable—number of blighted structures and vacancy rates—registered abandonment in terms of surplus property, land, and buildings, not residents.[22] The centrality of property in framing shared problems and solutions was striking. Meanwhile, other shared factors—histories of French colonialism, structural racism, and neoliberal governance—were elided.[23]

In both cities, plans to address abandonment became blueprints for a future that forgot its past.[24] Planners and politicians cast urban abandonment as a technocratic issue rooted in vacancy and depopulation, which could be solved through smarter land use, greening, public-private partnerships, entrepreneurship, volunteerism, and above all, shoring up property values. Before property values in Detroit could be bolstered, though, the breakdown in the property regime had to be addressed.

What is a property regime? I use the term property regime to refer to the logics, ideologies, and regulatory and juridical infrastructures that enable ownership by specifying relationships among people and between people and things. These specifications delineate what kinds of things count as property (such as land, ideas, objects, genetic material, people), who can own them, in what ways, and how they should be valued. All these decisions presuppose and reproduce forms of personhood and the norms and power relations of a society.

Places like Detroit are useful for thinking about the modern property form because they upend its presumed fixity. Science and technology studies scholars have observed that when systems are working, they are often taken for granted, particularly by those whom they benefit. During moments of breakdown, however, when users are unable to reap the benefits of the systems, they are more likely to question, transgress, work around, and enact alternatives to them. Moments of breakdown can, thus, provide insights into how systems are assembled, how they work, and for whom. This truism—often observed in studies of infrastructure (e.g., power grids, water pipes, bridges, dams)—is also useful for thinking about property regimes.[25]

Indeed, when property regimes are challenged or destabilized—be it through popular protest, war, disaster, political transition, or economic change—the process of stabilizing them or transitioning to a new regime can be a violent and complex affair. In the 2010s, the question of what to do with the Detroit's so-called abandoned lands dominated the political sphere and posed a logistical nightmare for government. Land acquisition and disposition policies led to lengthy and confusing procedures rife with political maneuvering. As government officials made efforts to streamline processes, passions flared among residents and in planning meetings about who was to blame for Detroit's predicament and what should be done.

Moments like these brought to the fore the political nature of property and the tremendous normative, material, legal, and discursive work involved in its stabilization.[26] They also suggested that those tasked with planning and land management were ill prepared to confront the problem at hand. Ironically, while contestations laid bare the fictitious nature of property itself and its oppressive history and function, bureaucrats doubled down on reifying it, approaching it as a technical issue of value or, at best, a political-economic issue of use and access. Missing, however, was an understanding of how urban land and property struggles reflect epistemological and ontological questions about how to live. How might more theoretical and empirical attention to the history and changing nature of modern property formations help us understand the stakes of such questions?

The Political Life of Property

Before property becomes a formation or a regime, it is an idea. But what kind of idea? Legal scholars generally approach property as a "bundle of rights" or set of "jural relations." Economists have often understood property as the best way to allocate scarce resources.[27] For example, utilitarian theorists have argued that property rights incite humans' self-interest to improve that which they own and encourage trade. Meanwhile, neoclassical economists have similarly argued that the privatization of common land is necessary to induce improvements and hard work (ignoring that common pool resources are often successfully managed). Indeed, as anthropologists have demonstrated, property regimes are cultural. There is nothing absolute about property, which is to say, modern property formations are not given.[28]

Modern private property rose in tandem with racial capitalism. Indeed, it is a precondition for capitalism, one that emerged through prolonged and violent historical struggle to control land and human beings. From the dispossession of smallholder European peasants to the conquest of the Americas, the transatlantic slave trade, and marriage under coverture, the rise of modern property created new ways of relating to the self, others, and the world. To understand redevelopment struggles in Detroit—as well as land and housing struggles in other cities—we must account for how this history shapes the present.

It's impossible to talk about liberal imaginaries of freedom in the United States without talking about property. Indeed, a hallmark of liberal justice is the right to real property. It is articulated as the right to acquire, possess, use, and dispose of land and physical resources; the right of first possession; and the right of contract and transfer of alienable property rights. While the right to property is often upheld as an entitlement of citizenship, this universal discourse is betrayed by the raced, classed, and gendered history of property itself, which continues to evolve to shape the material and psychosocial space of the American metropolis.

John Locke's assertion that every man had property in his person and that the labor of his body on the land and its resources made them *his property* is foundational to American jurisprudence.[29] This assured a certain freedom for the self-owning subject so long as he could materialize possession. Many could not. Large segments of the population in Europe were, in Eva von Redecker's words, "bereft of property." In the early nineteenth century, settler colonialism served as a "partial resolution to this conundrum," as Redecker writes. "Europe's surplus population could seek 'despotic dominion' in the

New World, replicating the dynamics of dispossession by propertization, this time by dispossessing indigenous people."[30] For example, the Treaty of Detroit codified the theft of Ottawa, Chippewa, Wyandot, and Potawatomi lands in what is now southeast Michigan. Its signing in 1807 underscores the relative newness of a system that also barred enslaved people and married women from owning property because they were not considered legal persons. This is to say, though Locke understood property as inherent in and an extension of the human subject, it was not just any subject but one who was an Anglo European, male, able bodied, and of a particular class.

On the colonial frontier, property making was state making. Indeed, the protection of property was the raison d'être of government.[31] The US Constitution linked the ideal of liberty to the sanctity of private property, first by summoning a liberal subject, and then by endowing this new citizen with the right to bear arms under the Second Amendment to protect *his* person, home, and property. In practice, the modern property form necessitated and continues to necessitate extensive social institutions that grant entitlement and securitization. This is apparent in efforts to shore up Detroit's property regime.

In the modern city, the form and function of property remain bound with the creation of racialized subjects, political subjectivities, and ideas about whose lives are valuable and whose are not. Indeed, liberalism and modern legal subjectivity have long been adjudicated on "one's capacity to appropriate."[32] Brenna Bhandar demonstrates how modern property laws and rationalities for private property were conjoined with emerging racial schemas, which together determined who was—and was not—fit to own land. Status, as Bhandar shows, was conferred based on colonial rationalities of improvement and justified by emerging "scientific" and legal conceptions of race that served the explicit purpose of delimiting entitlement, use, and enjoyment of land and other immovable property.[33]

Patterns of land ownership and wealth disparities in the Detroit metropolitan region exemplify how white people have been endowed with a vastly greater capacity than other racial groups to own property, establishing what legal scholar Cheryl Harris calls an enduring "property interest in whiteness."[34] This is a financial interest and a cultural identity that many whites fiercely cling to today, whether in overt demonstrations like brandishing guns or in quieter ways like moving to neighborhoods with "good" schools. Such racial and spatial ordering, as critical geographers have long argued, serves to naturalize the inequalities produced by capitalism to the benefit of elites.[35] It has also served to naturalize the self-possessive individual as the ideal citizen.

As this suggests, if we want to understand the politics of abandonment in contemporary Detroit, we must go beyond deindustrialization and suburbanization to illuminate how they are symptomatic of the structuring logics on which racial capitalist property regimes rest as well as exemplary of how historical power blocs secure their dominance. This is to say, abandonment must be interrogated not simply as a state or condition of being left behind but as intrinsic to the ownership model itself.

Modern property functions not merely through dispossession, as Grace Kuyoungown Hong reminds us, but by occluding and criminalizing other ways of relating to land, nature, and one another.[36] A proliferation of important early twenty-first-century work in urban geography, influenced by the rise of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx geographies, has recast urban land questions in North America and beyond by uplifting the ways oppressed communities have preserved relationships to space and place outside of dominion.[37] Detroit—a settler city steeped in Black radicalism and labor movement politics—has much to teach us about the role alternative geographical imaginaries and placemaking practices play in countering abandonment and realizing liberation.

The Politics of Abandonment

It's safe to say that the term *abandonment* is most often associated in popular consciousness with individual-level psychological theories, such as those that seek to explain fear of rejection, advocate for attachment, and treat trauma. Meanwhile, urban studies scholars have studied the grief associated with displacement due to urban renewal, arguing that when people's attachments to place are severed, communities commonly experience what Peter Read calls "place bereavement" and what Mindi Fullilove describes as "root shock."[38]

The approach to urban abandonment developed in this book traces a related but different genealogy through the structuring logics of property relations. An examination of the etymology of the word *abandonment* helps illustrate some of these connections. Notably, the term's development shows how the social norms and meanings often ascribed to abandonment are bound up with the historical emergence of Western regimes of private property, coincident processes of racialization, and the rise of the liberal state as described in the previous section. The term *abandonment* is traced to the eleventh and thirteenth centuries in Middle French. At that time, *mettre à bandon* meant to put under anyone's jurisdiction or domain, to proscribe, to release

from proscription, to banish. *Ban* referred to a restriction or obligation under feudal or church law. "There is a close association between a*ban*donment and other derivatives of ban, such as French *au ban*, meaning to outlaw, or the English 'band' meaning something that binds, fetters, or restricts; or bandit—one who is outside the law, unrestricted," writes sociologist Roger Salerno.[39] Thus, in its earliest uses, abandonment described submission to the authority, control, or jurisdiction of another. It denoted servitude and complete and utter surrender, for example, the submission of the serf to the master or the priest to the church.

By the fourteenth century, abandonment was also used to describe disregard for social obligation or "an abdication of one's rights or obligations to another person, place, value, or thing."[40] With the rise of agrarian capitalism, and as the enclosure movement in England forced tens of thousands of peasants from common farmland, the word's use expanded to refer to the severing of feudal ties, alienation of property, homelessness, and loss of a fixed place in the world. These new meanings signified a global rupture in relationality.

The rise of free-market capitalism, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the degeneration of medieval fealty and familial and patrimonial loyalties were not isolated European events. They were shaped by colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and new spatialized racial and gender divisions that denoted who was capable of ruling and who was not.

Under liberalism, abandonment started to connote something new—*freedom*. But it was a contingent freedom. Indeed, as philosopher Sylvia Wynter argues, the emergence of secular Man as a political subject, outside the church hierarchy, was realized only on the basis of the "'coloniality of power' and racism."[41] Within the context of colonialism and slavery, abandonment took on a new meaning. It came to denote, Salerno writes, "at one's own discretion," "at one's own will," and "without interference."[42] Abandonment, in this sense, was anchored by its opposite—slavery and servitude, that is, by those who lacked free will and, crucially, by those denied ownership of themselves and land. These meanings were eventually joined by others: "unrestricted freedom" and "free without responsibility."[43]

Thus, abandonment came to hold a double meaning, referring to both individual freedom and freedom from responsibility to others and place.[44] Abandonment, in short, denoted severalty—or the denial of mutuality and accountability—but it was also the foundation of liberal personhood. The unfreedom of some became the foundation of the freedom of others.[45]

This etymology underscores how the politics of urban abandonment are rooted in the conjoined histories of modern property and racial capitalism.

David Harvey has used the term "organized abandonment" to describe how the global financial system's drive to accumulate profit overdetermines how diverse actors—property owners, developers, the state, and residents—produce, use, transform, and *abandon* the built environment.[46] Elizabeth Povinelli uses the term "economies of abandonment" to name the ways that neoliberalism and late liberalism kill off social projects that do not produce market forms of life.[47] Likewise, Ruth Wilson Gilmore explains "organized abandonment" or "planned abandonment" as a strategy of racial capitalist state formation, tightly wedded to "organized violence," that exploits and treats vulnerable communities as surplus.[48] My approach extends these conversations by emphasizing the foundational role modern property plays in the politics of abandonment.

Throughout the book, I use the phrase the *politics of abandonment* to flag three interventions: First, rather than seeing capital as simply having moved on, leaving so-called abandoned cities in its wake, I aim to elucidate how racial capitalism is produced and reproduced through the conjoining of race and property, as well as through the state's role in capacitating the factors of production that enable its mobility.[49] Since the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis, racial capitalism has reemerged as an analytic and method to understand how race, colonialism, and capitalism intersect to shape the world.[50] Processes like the tax-foreclosure auction (the focus of chapter 3) and the corporate land giveaways under emergency management and bankruptcy (discussed in chapter 5) demonstrate how capitalism is secured through *ongoing* racialized primitive accumulation facilitated by the state and direct much needed attention to the central role that land, property, and debt play therein. Seen in this way, Detroit's abandonment is not merely an outcome of flight. Rather, it is an active state strategy and racialized mode of governance.

This formulation makes clear that capital, as Adam Bledsoe and Willie Wright argue, does not simply leave poor Black and Brown people and communities of color behind but rather targets them as a fix for value extraction and accumulation.[51] Put another way, abandonment is "a strategic exercise of power," to draw on the words of Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen, and an old social problem refashioned as a condition of racial state retrenchment.[52] Not only does it subtend the neoliberal regulation of life. It is also its organized outcome, Gilmore reminds us.[53] This active, relational, and, crucially, racialized understanding of abandonment is important to emphasize precisely because postindustrial cities are so often taken to be sites of absence—places absent capital, absent government, absent people. This book aims to disabuse us of this myth.

This brings us to the second way I use the phrase the *politics of abandonment*—to signal a political field in which interest groups deploy abandonment as a category toward different ends. When abandonment is reduced to vacant housing, buildings, lots, or blocks, as it often is in scholarship on postindustrial cities, the historical production of abandonment as a category and political field itself is obscured. To understand the conditions of possibility that allow categories of abandonment to emerge in specific times and places, we need to attend to how abandonment discourses circulate and are enacted through property regimes. For example, I examine how discourses of marginal and wasted land rooted in Eurocentric notions of personhood and improvement work to devalue entire groups of people and their lifeways.[54]

Analyzing continuities and shifts in the assignation of "abandoned" and "wasted" lands—from the doctrines of discovery to planners' and city officials' contemporary classifications—underscores how such political categorization functions as a mechanism of resource transfer. It also suggests how categories of abandonment, vacancy, and waste—and the mythologies they conjure—are deeply embedded in Western conceptions of the human. Such discourses act as powerful material, cultural, and symbolic forces in the production of white belonging and resettlement. They also subtend neoliberal calculations of risk that justify austerity and moral indifference as viable public policy. The stakes of this categorical work, as activists' critiques make clear, is not simply revanchist urbanism but also the negation of alternative ways of ordering society developed by communities who reside in what sociologist Avery Gordon names as "in-difference" to forces of capital and power.[55]

Thus, a third way I use the term the *politics of abandonment* is to direct attention to the struggles over places commonly seen as "left behind" by people and capital. My interest here is in what these struggles reveal about how people organize "social projects" that run "diagonal to hegemonic ways of life," in Povinelli's words, or in Gilmore's words, at "novel resolutions" in an effort to establish more democratic forms of urbanism.[56] There is an urgency, I believe, in understanding how people who lack resources but not, as Gilmore writes, "'resourcefulness' develop the capacity to combine themselves into extraordinary forces and form the kinds of organizations that are the foundation of liberatory social movements."[57] This urgency is felt acutely when it comes to rethinking and reorganizing land and property relations.

If liberal property formations organize abandonment, then we ought to learn from those who have sought to break with the propertied logics that structure racial capitalism and the racial state. Indeed, struggles over the

making and unmaking of property regimes in Detroit bring into stark relief the centrality of land—in its material, psychic, and spiritual realms—to liberation. The epistemological and ontological breaks forged through such struggles open possibilities for imagining more just urban futures *after property,* in which a sense of collective identity supersedes the ideal of self-ownership and land is held in sacred relationship to the broader web of life rather than abstracted as a commodity.

Overview of the Book

The following chapters offer a recent history of land and property politics in Detroit. Chapter 2 (On Our Own Ground) rereads Detroit's postwar decline from the vantage point of radical activists who staked claims to urban space. The 1967 rebellion in Detroit—which erupted in a geopolitical context of Cold War anxiety and global movements for decolonization—ushered in a new phase of political struggle in which questions of land and territory became central. I demonstrate how the uprising presaged the rise of the Black political class in Detroit as well as a neoliberal assault on progressive politics that continues to this day.

This is, perhaps, nowhere more evident than in continued struggles over the right to stay put. By the 2010s, Detroit had gone from a bastion of middle-class Black homeownership to a foreclosure, eviction, and speculation hotspot, where a new class of land barons reigned. Chapter 3 (Stealing Home) tells the story of how one of the world's largest tax-foreclosure auctions functioned as a technology of wealth transfer. The auction wreaked havoc on the city. It deepened racial disparities, fueled speculation, and unmade the long-standing American dream of homeownership. The chapter traces the origins of the auction to a well-organized US property and states' rights movement that aimed to privatize public land, discipline the poor, and preserve ruling elite entitlements.

I also examine how the auction contributed to huge agglomerations of de facto public land. The glut of state land raised critical questions about how tax-reverted lands should be used, cared for, owned, and transferred. Chapter 4 (White Picket Fences) analyzes the stakes of new formations of authority, citizenship, and care that became central to state efforts to stabilize property markets.

State efforts to manage and dispose of property were complicated by the fact that land was not empty. Residents had long staked claims to land in various ways, from invoking historical loss and racial injustice to establishing

gardens and community centers, mowing fields, and squatting in houses. These community caretaking practices on interstitial lands illuminate a reworked vision of the urban commons and land ethic rooted in Black urban life and spatial politics. Such insurgent forms of sociality underscore the tremendous capacity for self-organization that resides in communities. They also suggest that reimagining ownership is critical to countering planned abandonment.

State plans to privatize de facto public land were indelibly shaped by the Great Recession. Throughout my fieldwork, Detroit was mired in debates over debt and indebtedness. In chapter 5 (Accounting for Unpayable Debt), I examine how efforts by the state of Michigan to impose emergency management coincided with the launch of the Detroit Metropolitan Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was charged with investigating race-based inequities in the region. On the face of it, they were distinct processes. One focused on reconciling fiscal debt; the other, moral debt. Yet their proximity in time and space—and the related tensions that surrounded both—suggest the importance of thinking about how the politics of accounting and collective memory work have become a key facet of twenty-first-century urbanism.

In the second half of the twentieth century, anti-Black dystopian images of Detroit as an urban jungle and place to fear dominated the media. By the twenty-first century, Detroit was more commonly conjured as an urban wilderness and new American frontier. In this new era, struggles over the future of Detroit were indelibly shaped by pervasive mythmaking manifest in cultural events like parades, photographic representations, ruin tourism, and general discourse. Chapter 6 (Conjuring Terra Nullius) tells the story of the revival of the legend of *nain rouge*—an impish red dwarf that haunts Detroit—to explore the integral role of terra nullius in the territorialization of whiteness. I also analyze efforts by residents to counter vacancy discourses by illuminating the importance of geography and geographical imaginaries to social justice struggles.

I extend this line of thinking in chapter 7 (Political Ecologies of Austerity) to consider how the discursive and technical treatment of land as empty and of private property as a civilizing mechanism on the frontier extend through contemporary urban planning practices in ways that facilitate large-scale green redevelopment schemes. I analyze how vacancy is categorically and strategically deployed within a racialized assemblage of interests, forms of expertise, and governmental techniques to revalue urban space under late capitalism. Specifically, I tell the story of a proprietary assessment called the Market Value Analysis (MVA), which city officials in Detroit and across the

country have used to make critical decisions about which neighborhoods to target for investment, disinvestment, and public-service upgrades or disconnections. If industrial labor defined Detroit's economy and land-use planning decisions in the twentieth century, the MVA illuminates the extent to which real estate markets and finance capital do so in a new age of austerity and the stakes thereof for urban futures.

Efforts to reimagine Detroit turned on encouraging new land uses. As I explore in chapter 8 (The Garden Is a Weapon in the War), a diverse range of actors—from activists to planners, financiers, and foundations—began to herald postindustrial Detroit for its agrarian potential. I tell the story of financier John Hantz's controversial proposal to build the world's largest urban forest in the center of the city. I contrast the aspirations of Hantz Woodlands' with those of Black radical farmers in Detroit, who have sought to respond to racial capitalism and political abandonment by establishing community infrastructures and institutions that support Black life.

I conclude with an epilogue (Reconstructing the World) that considers the rash of protests against the water shutoffs in Detroit in 2014 to reflect on what the key arguments regarding property and abandonment made in the preceding chapters might offer for making sense of urgent land and housing questions facing other cities. Here I consider what the visions and aspirations of those organizing to fight against the water shutoffs suggest for the possibilities of untethering urban governance and planning from the protection of capitalist interests, property rights, and property values.

Collectively, these chapters reveal that the paradox of a city with too much land but not enough to go around is not a paradox at all but rather a reflection of the constitutive relationship between property and abandonment. They show how racial capitalism expands, literally on the ground, through new assemblages aimed at repairing and maintaining private property regimes in postindustrial and shrinking cities. They demonstrate how the lived implications of a "new Detroit" for longtime residents, especially for those who are poor, Black, and marginalized, turn on the ways property rights and land use are negotiated and enacted across racial and economic difference. Ultimately, *The City after Property* invites readers to think with Detroit activists, residents, and scholars about the role of land and property in bringing about more ethical forms of societal organization.

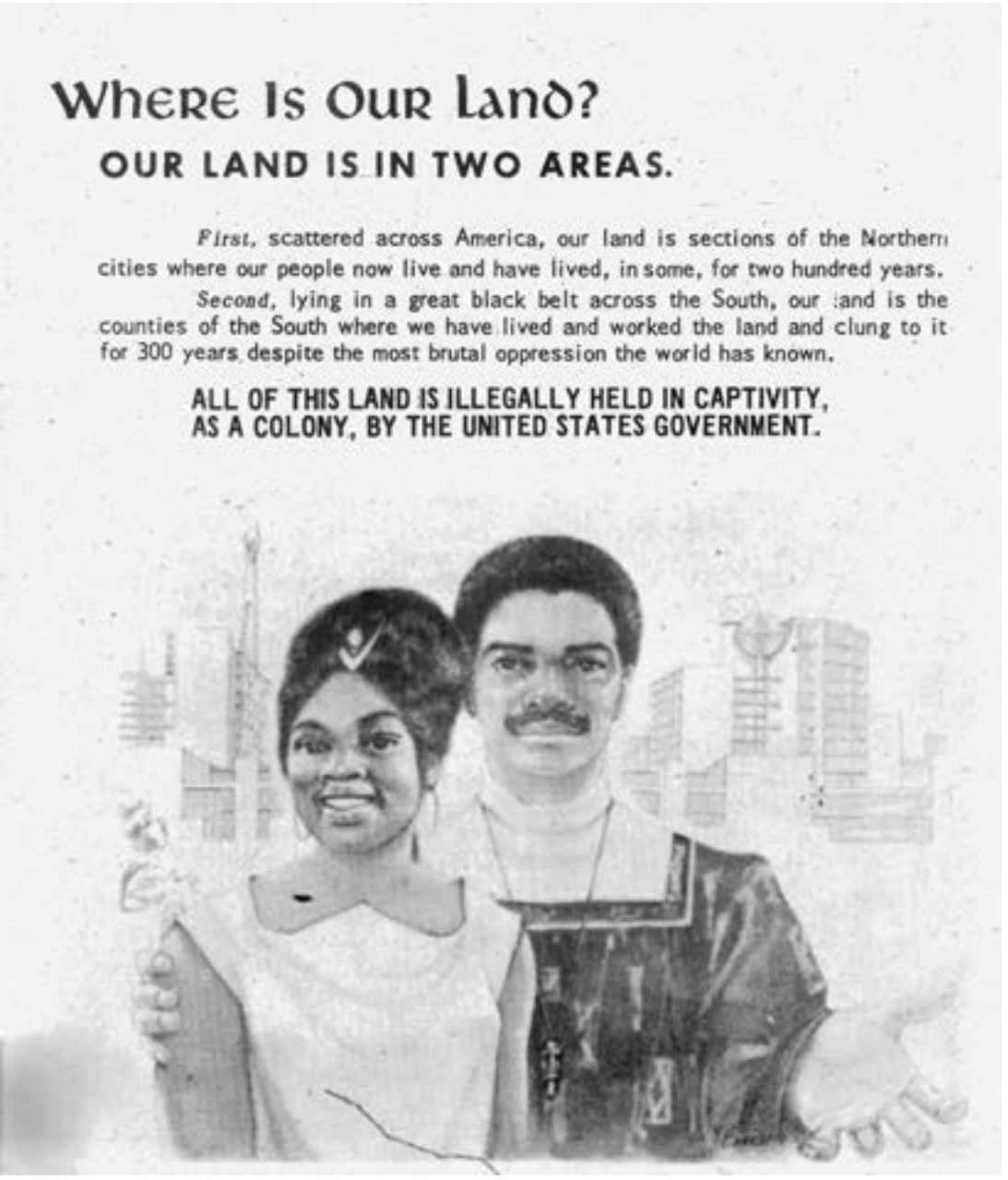


Figure 2.1 | An undated illustration from the *New Afrikan: Voice of the Provisional Government of New Afrika*. *Source:* Robert Williams Papers, 1959–1997, Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI. Image courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library.

notes

Prologue

1 Beaver, "Civil War on the North Fork," 98–100; Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War*, 34; Our State Staff, "Invisible Appalachia: Junaluska," *Our State*, February 2015, https://www.ourstate.com/junaluska/.
2 On representations of Appalachia, see Billings, "Economic Representations in an American Region," 172–85.
3 On thinking about theory and study as liberatory practice, see hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice," 59–75; Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*.
4 Campbell et al., *People's Atlas of Detroit*. The companion documentary is *A People's Story of Detroit*, video, 1:02:00, Detroit People's Platform, September 12, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcAvvr6yYjM. Andrew Newman and I have also written about the Uniting Detroiters project here: Newman and Safransky, "Remapping the Motor City," 17–28.

Chapter One. Unbuilding a City

1 Jonathan Oosting, "Urban Farming Entrepreneur John Hantz Suggests Homestead Act for Detroit," *MLive*, April 8, 2010, https://www.mlive.com/business/detroit/2010/04/urban_farming_entrepreneur_joh.html; "Michigan Governor Seeks Visas to Lure Skilled Immigrants to Detroit," *Aljazeera America*, January 23, 2014, http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/1/23/michigan-governoreyes50000visastoattractimmigrants.html; "Zombie Apocalypse Theme Park Could Take Over Abandoned Neighborhood in Detroit," *HuffPost*, July 2, 2012, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/zombie-apocalaypse-detroit-theme-park_n_1644298; Rick Perlstein, "Hell Isle," *Nation*, January 28, 2013, accessed June 27, 2020, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/hell-isle/; Detroit Future City, *2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan* (Detroit, MI: Inland Press, 2013), https://detroitfuturecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/DFC_Full_2nd.pdf.

2 I am indebted to Erin Collins for conversations early on about abandonment and an American Association of Geographers conference session that we organized on the "Social Geographies of Urban Abandonment."

3 Several scholars have analyzed how Detroit has become a spectacle, including Herron, "Detroit," 663–82; Herron, "Forgetting Machine"; Herron, "Motor City Breakdown"; John Patrick Leary, "Detroitism," *Guernica,* January 15, 2011, http://www.guernicamag.com/features/leary_1_15_11/; Kinney, "Longing for Detroit," 1–14; and Millington, "Post-Industrial Imaginaries," 279–96.

4 More than half of the city's children lived at or below the poverty rates (which, in 2010, was less than $22,050 per year for a family of four). *State of the Detroit Child: 2010* (Detroit, MI: Data Driven Detroit, 2011), https://datadrivendetroit.org/web_ftp/Project_Docs/DETKidsDrft_FINAL.pdf.

5 On precarity being a permanent state of exception under capitalism, see Mahmud, "Precarious Existence and Capitalism," 699–726.

6 In addition to economic obsolescence, postindustrial society flagged a general set of claims about shifts in the nature of work and labor relations, including the predominance of the service sector (versus agricultural or industrial); the rise of white-collar work over blue; and the growing economic importance of research, technology, financial services, and associated institutions (universities, hospitals, banks).

7 Charlie LeDuff, "What Killed Aiyana Stanley-Jones?," *Mother Jones*, November/December 2010, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2010/09/aiyana-stanley-jones-detroit/.

8 Andrew Clark and Jill Treanor, "Greenspan—I Was Wrong about the Economy, Sort of," *Guardian* (UK), October 23, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2008/oct/24/economics-creditcrunch-federal-reserve-greenspan.

9 For instance, we might recall Daniel Moynihan, who as President Richard Nixon's counselor took the controversial and since disgraced stance of "benign neglect" regarding issues of race. See Peter Kihss, "'Benign Neglect' on Race Is Proposed by Moynihan," *New York Times*, March 1, 1970, 1, 69, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1970/03/01/90600209.html. Also see "Text of the Moynihan Memorandum on the Status of Negroes," *New York Times*, March 1, 1970, 69.

10 Wallace and Wallace, *Plague on Your Houses*. Also see Starr, *Urban Choices*; and Roger Starr, "Making New York Smaller," *New York Times*, November 14, 1976, https://www.nytimes.com/1976/11/14/archives/making-new-york-smaller-the-citys-economic-outlook-remains-grim.html.

11 As Alesia Montgomery has argued in the case of Detroit, sustainability became its own regime of capitalist growth. Montgomery, *Greening the Black Urban Regime*.

12 On the shrinkage debate, see Jennifer Bradley, "We Need a New Mindset to Unbuild Cities," *New York Times*, March 28, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com

/roomfordebate/2011/03/28/the-incredible-shrinking-city/we-need-a-new-mindset-to-unbuild-cities. Also see Nate Berg, "Next Steps for Shrinking Cities: Results from a Planetizen Brainstorm," *Planetizen*, July 9, 2009, https://www.planetizen.com/node/39619.

13 See, for example, Dillard, *Faith in the City*; Fine, *Violence in the Model City*; Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*; Hartigan, *Racial Situations*; Shaw, *Now Is the Time*; and Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*

14 Including Thomas Sugrue's now classic *Origins of Urban Crisis*, June Manning Thomas' seminal *Redevelopment and Race*, and Freund's monumental *Colored Property*.

15 Important exceptions include recent books by Herbert, *Detroit Story*; Kinder, *DIY Detroit*; and Montgomery, *Greening the Black Urban Regime*.

16 See, for example, Harvey, "Spatial Fix," 1–12; Mezzadra and Neilson, "Operations of Capital," 1–9; and Brenner and Schmid, "Planetary Urbanization," 449–53; for debates over the planetary urbanization concept, see Oswin, "Planetary Urbanization," 540–46; and the entire issue of *Society and Space* 36, no. 3 (2018).

17 Mishuana Goeman's concept of "storied land" has helped me understand the processes of meaning making that happen vis-à-vis land. To understand "land as a storied site of human interaction," Goeman writes, is to "(re)open its meaning beyond territory, property, or location while retaining its political vitality." Recognizing land beyond property and territory involves understanding land as a "meaning making process rather than a claimed object." See Goeman, "Land as Life," 72–73. This work requires, as she explains elsewhere, "reaching back across generations, critically examining our use of the word land in the present, and reaching forward to create a healthier relationship for future generations." See Goeman, "From Place to Territories and Back Again," 24. Also see Tuck, Guess, and Sultan, "Not Nowhere," 1–11; Tuck et al., "Geotheorizing Black/Land," 52–74; and La Paperson, "Ghetto Land Pedagogy," 115–30.

18 This framing of seeing landscapes in terms of loss is indebted to sociologist Montgomery, "Sight of Loss," 1828–50.

19 Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast in 2005. Flooding precipitated intense depopulation. New Orleans's population decreased by over half. Seventy percent of the city's occupied housing was damaged by the storm.

20 Horowitz, *Katrina*, 3.

21 To be clear, from colonial forts to postindustrial cities, urban plans and policies have always been shaped within geographies of comparison.

22 For comparison of Detroit to post-Katrina New Orleans, see, for example, Dan Kildee, interview by Craig Fahle, *The Craig Fahle Show*, WDET, August 2, 2013, http://archives.wdet.org/shows/craig-fahle-show/episode/callers-on-dan-kildee-comments/. In 2011, weeks before Mayor David Bing launched the Detroit Works Project with the aim of shrinking Detroit, he

met with New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu to talk about downsizing strategies. On the meeting between Bing and Landrieu, see Campbell Robertson, "A Lesson for Detroit in Efforts to Aid a New Orleans Devastated by Katrina," *New York Times*, February 22, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/23/us/a-lesson-for-detroit-in-efforts-to-aid-a-new-orleans-devastated-by-katrina.html. The German Marshall Fund of the United States has funded a number of comparative programs and partnerships between cities. See, for example, *GMF 2010 Annual Report* (Washington, DC: German Marshall Fund, 2010), https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2010gmf_annual_final_0.pdf.

23 Critical literature on post-Katrina reconstruction provides useful insights into Detroit. Plans to "rightsize" New Orleans were stopped by popular protests; however, the plan to rebuild everywhere did not produce a more just city. In the wake of Katrina, the widespread volunteerism that followed was taken by many as a sign of democratic popular reconstruction, yet studies of its impact tell a different story. The embrace of volunteerism coincided with an intensified assault on and privatization of the public realm, such as the demolition of public housing complexes, closures of the city's public hospital, and school privatization. See, for example, Johnson, *Neoliberal Deluge*; Arena, *Driven from New Orleans*; Adams and Sakakeeny, *Remaking New Orleans*; and Adams, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith*. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer who directed me to these sources.

24 See Nicholas Blomley on how the survey acts as a "form of organized forgetting." Blomley, *Unsettling the City*, 112.

25 This truism about systems breakdown—often observed in studies of infrastructure (e.g., power grids, water pipes, bridges, dams) and political collapse—is also useful for thinking about property regimes. Star and Ruhleder, "Steps toward an Ecology of Infrastructure," 111–34; Graham and Thrift, "Out of Order," 1–2.

26 The sanctity of landed private property obscures its peculiarity. As the political economist Karl Polanyi wrote, "What we call land is an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man's institutions. To isolate it and form a market for it was perhaps the weirdest of all the undertakings of our ancestors." Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 187.

27 Notions of scarcity are deeply rooted when it comes to land, extending at least as far back as the physiocrats, who in the eighteenth century argued that wealth originated in the land, that land was finite, and that private property was central to societal well-being.

28 See, for example, C. M. Rose, *Property and Persuasion*; Hann, "Introduction," 1–47; Hann, "Property: Anthropological Aspects," 153–59; von Benda-Beckmann, von Benda-Beckmann, and Wiber, "Properties of Property," 1–39; Singer, *Entitlement*; and van de Walt, *Property in the Margins*.

29 Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*.

30 Redecker, "Ownership's Shadow," 43. If settler colonialism turned on (turns on) the possession of land and territory, then "property law was [and is] the primary means of realizing this desire," as Bhandar writes. "There cannot be a history of private property law. . . . in early modern England that is not at the same time a history of land appropriation in Ireland, the Caribbean, North America, and beyond." Indeed, the granting of land in Detroit by the French and then British Crown was coincident with enclosures in Europe. Bhandar, *Colonial Lives*, 3. Also see Wolfe, "Settler Complex," 1–22; Wolfe, "Land, Labor, and Difference," 866–905; and Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism*.

In Detroit, as historian Tiya Miles shows, settler colonial expansion depended on the displacement and forced labor of both Indigenous peoples and Africans. See Miles, *Dawn of Detroit.* Also see Kyle T. Mays's *City of Dispossessions* for an examination of how Black and Indigenous dispossession shape contemporary Detroit and the development of modern US cities more generally. On scholarship that questions how to best analyze the complex relationships among whiteness, Blackness, and Indigeneity, see Kelley, "Rest of Us"; Byrd, "Weather with You"; C. I. Harris, "Of Blackness and Indigeneity"; and King, *Black Shoals*.

31 Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*.

32 Bhandar, *Colonial Lives*, 4.

33 Bhandar, *Colonial Lives*. Also see Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being," 257–337.

34 C. I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1707–9. Harris argues that whiteness, which begins as a type of status property, becomes an entitlement to social goods, continuing today, for example, in affirmative action litigation. Like property, whiteness shares the characteristics of the right to use and enjoyment, the power to exclude, and reputational value.

35 On foundational works in geography, see for example, H. M. Rose, "Geography of Despair," 453–64; Blaut, *Colonizer's Model of the World;* Woods, *Development Arrested*; B. M. Wilson, *America's Johannesburg*; Kobayashi and Peake, "Racism out of Place," 392–403; Pulido, "Reflections on a White Discipline," 42–49; Delaney, "Space That Race Makes," 6–14; and Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.

36 Hong, "Property."

37 A proliferation of important early twenty-first century work in geography, influenced by the rise of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx geographies, has directed renewed attention to land and property relations in North American cities and between urban and rural areas. Recent examples of scholarship include but are not limited to studies that direct attention to land and property in relationship to haunting (Best and Ramírez, "Urban Specters," 1043–54); settler colonialism (Blatman-Thomas and Porter, "Placing Property," 30–45; Hugill, "What Is a Settler-Colonial City?," 1–11; Dorries, Hugill,

and Tomiak, "Racial Capitalism," 263–70); policing, gentrification, and the carceral state (Bonds, "Race and Ethnicity I," 574–83); white propertied power and the valorization of whiteness (Brand, "Sedimentation of Whiteness as Landscape," 276–91); Black, Latinx, and Indigenous geographies and urban futures (Ramírez, "City as Borderland," 147–66; Ramírez, "Take the Houses Back," 682–93); vacancy (Noterman, "Taking Back Vacant Property," 1079–98; Noterman, "Speculating on Vacancy," 123–38; McClintock, "Nullius No More?," 91–108); racial liberalism and water crisis (Ranganathan, "Thinking with Flint," 17–33); foreclosures and racial banishment (Roy, "Dis/possessive Collectivism," A1–A11); abolition ecology (Heynen, "Urban Political Ecology II," 839–45); narratives and storytelling (Brahinsky, "Story of Property," 837–55); social reproduction and informality (Goffe, "Capture and Abandon"); appraisal science and predatory property relations (Zaimi, "Rethinking 'Disinvestment,'" 245–57); technology (McElroy, "Property as Technology," 112–29); housing financialization (Fields and Raymond, "Racialized Geographies of Housing Financialization," 1625–45); Black liberation theology and Black agrarian futures (McCutcheon, "Growing Black Food on Sacred Land," 887–905); and the relationship between urban and rural property relations (Van Sant, Shelton, and Kay, "Connecting Country and City," 1–15).

38 Read, "Enclosing the Spirit," 163; Fullilove, *Root Shock*, 11.

39 See Salerno, *Landscapes of Abandonment*, 3. Notably, the French word *banlieue* (literally "banned place") is also link to the word abandon. *Banlieue* is the name given to the urban outskirts in France where much public housing is concentrated and many people whose families immigrated from West Africa, North Africa, and Southeast Asia live. In this sense, as my colleague Andrew Newman pointed out to me, the racist aspects of the word's history extend beyond English.

40 Salerno, *Landscapes of Abandonment*, 3.

41 See Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being," 263. Wynter is engaging Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo's work on coloniality, particularly papers presented at the Conference on Coloniality Working Group at SUNY-Binghamton in 1999 and 2000. As Wynter notes, Quijano used the phrase "coloniality of power" and Mignolo, "colonial difference."

42 Salerno, *Landscapes of Abandonment*, 4.

43 Salerno, *Landscapes of Abandonment*, 4.

44 Severalty means the conditions of being separate or distinct, as in severed. In property law, for example, "property in severalty" signifies individual or sole ownership, without joined interest with anyone else. See "severalty" in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2022).

45 This sense of freedom associated with the rise of liberalism represented a new way of thinking about economic affairs. While the term *laissez-faire*

capitalism (free-market capitalism) suggests nonintervention, as Perelman has noted, the early political economists systematically engaged in projects to make society more market oriented by urging measures to deprive people of any alternatives to wage labor. They advocated simultaneously for laissez-faire ideology and for policies that were at odds with laissez-faire principles. These policies were focused on undermining people's ability to provide for themselves and keeping people from finding alternative survival strategies outside the system of wage labor. People were driven to wage labor through brutal discipline. If the poor were taken to not be sufficiently industrious, their want of discipline was criminalized and medicalized. Thus, the violent dispossession of the people and the creation of free-market economics was a dual, complementary project. In other words, the invisible hand only operated in the framework of contrived law and order. See, e.g., Perelman, *Invention of Capitalism*.

46 Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, 397.

47 Povinelli, Economies of Abandonment, 29.

48 Gilmore, "Forgotten Places," 31–61. For other interpretations of abandonment, see Biehl, "Technologies of Invisibility," 248–71; Giroux, "Reading Hurricane Katrina," 171–96.

49 See Bhandar, *Colonial Lives*, on the coevolution of racial and property regimes.

50 See, for example, Jenkins and Leroy, "Introduction," 1–26; Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," 76–85; and *Boston Review*'s 2017 special issue, "Race, Capitalism, Justice," Forum 1.

51 Bledsoe and Wright, "Anti-Blackness of Global Capital," 8–26.

52 Gross-Wyrtzen, "Contained and Abandoned in the 'Humane' Border," 893. As Geraldine Pratt writes, "Abandonment is not equivalent to exclusion. It has a more complex topological relation of being neither inside nor outside the juridical order. The difference between exclusion and abandonment turns on the fact that abandonment is an active, relational process. The one who is abandoned remains in a relationship with sovereign power: included through exclusion." Pratt, "Abandoned Women and Spaces of the Exception," 1054.

53 As Gilmore writes, "The quality of having been forgotten that materially links such places is not merely about absence or lack. Abandoned places are also planned concentrations or sinks—of hazardous materials and destructive practices that are in turn sources of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death (which, whether state-sanctioned or extra-legal, is how racism works, regardless of the intent of the harms' producers, who produce along the way racialization and therefore race)." See Gilmore, "Forgotten Places," 35–36.

54 My thinking here is related to Biehl's conceptualization of "technologies of invisibility." In "Technologies of Invisibility," Biehl asks how social and

scientific technologies are combined into governance to make people invisible. Biehl is concerned with how technical-political dynamics make people invisible and how they are dying—its experience, distribution, and social representation. For Biehl, "technologies of invisibility" are the bureaucratic procedures, informational difficulties, sheer medical neglect, moral contempt, and unresolved disputes over diagnostic criteria that turn people into absent things. Similarly, I am interested in how vacancy and abandonment discourses work to make people invisible.

55 I draw on ideas of "being in-difference" from Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, v, 48–49. Gordon writes, "Being in-difference is a political consciousness and a sensuous knowledge: a standpoint and a mindset for living on better terms than what we're offered, for living as if you had the necessity and the freedom to do so. By better, I mean a collective life without misery, deathly inequalities, mutating racisms, social abandonment, endless war, police power, authoritarian governance, heteronormative impositions, patriarchal rule, cultural conformity, and ecological destruction" (v).

56 Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment*, 30; Gilmore, "Forgotten Places," 36.

57 Gilmore, "Forgotten Places," 34. Gilmore is drawing on Ganz, "Resources and Resourcefulness," 1003–62.

Chapter Two. On Our Own Ground

1 Much has been written about the 1967 uprising in Detroit. See, in particular, these excellent sources: Hersey, *Algiers Motel*; Fine, *Violence in the Model City*; J. M. Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*; Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*.

2 The terminology also conflated the uprisings of the 1960s with race riots of earlier decades, when white people exacted raw violence on Black people. There were those of 1918 in East St. Louis; Chester, Pennsylvania; and Lexington, Kentucky. The next year, riots erupted in scores of cities and towns across the country when white soldiers returning from World War I accused African Americans of taking their jobs. It was dubbed the Red Summer of 1919. Two years later, in 1921, there was the massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma; and then, in Detroit, the riots of 1943, to name but a few. Thus, riots could not be used to describe 1967 because riots were, in short, the outcome of white rage.

3 In July of the same year, California passed the Mulford Bill (aka the Panther Bill), which criminalized the open display of firearms.

4 Shelia Porter is a pseudonym. I use a combination of interviewees' real names and pseudonyms throughout the book. Whenever I use pseudonyms, I indicate them as such. In some instances, I use the interviewees' real names, specifically when one's identity cannot be easily masked or is central to the analysis. As mentioned in the prologue, I draw on interviews that were