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Constitutive Memories Of City Space: Rhetorics Of Civil Rights Memory In Detroit's Urban Landscape

Scott Mitchell
Wayne State University,

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**CONSTITUTIVE MEMORIES OF CITY SPACE: RHETORICS OF CIVIL RIGHTS
MEMORY IN DETROIT'S URBAN LANDSCAPE**

by

SCOTT A. MITCHELL

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

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As I reached the finish line on this dissertation and my graduate studies, a friend recently asked me to describe what earning my Ph.D. was like and the challenges that came along with these past four years. When I started the doctoral program at Wayne State, I thought I had this whole process figured out. From classes and teaching to qualifying exams and the dissertation, I thought I knew what I was doing. I could not have been more wrong. As I told my friend, these last few years, particularly during the dissertation-writing phase, were the loneliest, draining, and exhausting times of my life. While we often remind ourselves of clichés during these low points like “It’s a marathon, not a sprint,” “It always seems impossible until its done,” or “The best dissertations are done dissertations,” the truth for me was that this final stage took a toll on me, pushing me to my limits emotionally, mentally, and physically. But in the toughest moments, I have been lucky to have people at my side to pick me up, dust me off, and remind me that I belong here, that I have a place in a field that I love and am passionate about researching and teaching about. To each of you, I am deeply indebted to your support, and want to take this moment to express my gratitude for sacrificing your own time not out of obligation or pity, but from positions of friendship and love. It was your support that got me through this and while my name is the one atop this dissertation, I truly consider this a collective effort. Without you all, none of this would have been possible.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Chapter 1 DETROIT, CITY OF MEMORIES: AN INTRODUCTION	1
Related Literature	8
Analytic Procedures	13
Chapter Previews	17
Chapter 2 HAUNTING MEMORY: THE OSSIAN SWEET HOUSE	26
A Different Detroit	31
<i>The Sweet Life</i>	35
<i>A Sweet Legacy</i>	39
Haunted Legacy: Specters of Sweet	42
<i>Memories of Resistance</i>	46
<i>Remembering not to forget</i>	50
Mnemonic Revenant	54
<i>A Haunting Memory</i>	58
The Revenant's Rupture	63
Chapter 3 EMERGENT MEMORY: THE 8-MILE WALL	72
Dividing Detroit	76
8 Mile: Urban Border	79
Toward Emergent Memory	84
A Wall of Memory	89
Emergent Memory: Constitutive Mnemonics	96

Chapter 4 PERSISTENT MEMORY: THE 1967 UPRISING AND 12TH STREET	105
Detroit 1967: Collected Tensions	108
<i>Police Relations</i>	112
The Uprising	115
<i>The Aftermath</i>	120
Rhetorical Productions of Amnesia	124
<i>Absence & Presence</i>	125
<i>Naming & Identification</i>	130
Beginning Again: Public Forgetting and Reconciliation	136
Detroit: Unsettled Grounds	143
Chapter 5 DISRUPTIVE MEMORY: THE FIST	153
Not your Average Joe	156
Deciphering Detroit's Fist	160
The Fist's Memory: Contingent Rhetorics	167
<i>Cultural Projections</i>	168
<i>Embodied Defiance: Habitus</i>	172
<i>An Enduring Mark</i>	179
Mnemonic Endurance: Contingent Disruptions	184
<i>Marked by Memory</i>	186
Chapter 6 DETROIT, AN URBAN PALIMPSEST: A CONCLUSION	196
Dimensions of Detroit: Decline, Demolition, and Development	198
At Detroit's Core	202

Emergent Memory Study.....	207
Driving Detroit: Motors of Memory.....	208
Limitations and Future Study.....	211
Closing Thoughts: The Palimpsest Problematic and Possibility.....	213
References	218
Abstract	234
Autobiographical Statement	236

Chapter 1 DETROIT, CITY OF MEMORIES: AN INTRODUCTION

People today believe that we have an administration that is all about the quality of the life in the neighborhoods...the underlying message is one of hope¹

-Mike Duggan, Detroit mayor, September 2014

He tries to act like he's a friend to the people in the community. He's not. He's a friend to the people foreclosing on our homes. Mayor Duggan is an efficient co-opter of black leaders, and he'll tell you the city is better off. The city is by far not better off.²

-Diane Butkowski, editor of *The Voice of Detroit*, January 2018.

On February 26, 2014, Mike Duggan delivered his first State of the City speech as the newly elected mayor for the city of Detroit. Reflecting on his first few months in office, Duggan's speech was grounded in optimism, promise, and excitement as he opened his remarks with a firm declaration: "Here's what I know for sure: the change has started, and the change in Detroit is real."³ Immediately, members of the audience erupted in applause, because change in Detroit was an idea often dreamt about but rarely realized. Less than six months prior to Duggan's address, Detroit crumbled underneath the weight of debt and a decades-long decline in what was the largest municipal bankruptcy declaration in American history. For a city once highly regarded as a model city, America's arsenal of democracy, and the Motor City, the 2013 bankruptcy and subsequent mayoral election have proven to be a crucial sequence of events for Detroit.⁴ Mayor Duggan recognized the significance of his first address, and, as his remarks continued, he relayed a plan to restore public faith in a city that had failed them. Duggan's speech reviewed the complicated web of issues that drove Detroit to financial ruin, while also acknowledging that solutions to these problems would not come easy. But the Mayor assured his listeners of one promise: "We are going to start to move through this

city, neighborhood by neighborhood...and we're going to work with you, in the community." As Duggan's first State of the City address ended, a theme emerged for the new administration: change and restoration were on the horizon; Detroit's residents would be at the heart of the city's revival.

Without question, Detroit has changed tremendously. On March 6, 2018, Mayor Duggan was once more addressing his constituents. During his annual address, Duggan stated, "To the people of this city, I'm deeply honored by the confidence you gave me...I told you in the first four years we're there to fix...I'm not talking about that stuff anymore. Now we're talking about building one Detroit for all of us. And we're doing it together."⁵ Where the tone of his initial address was one of assurance, Duggan now described Detroit with a sense of accomplishment. Without question, in the four years since Duggan became mayor, episodes of dramatic change have marked his time. As Duggan explained in his most recent State of the City address, transformations to Detroit's economic, education, and housing landscapes have instilled a sense of optimism about the city's future. These changes, however, have not been without controversy. For example, Duggan noted that changes in the city were causing economic upheaval leaving some Detroiters feeling left behind during the age of progress.⁶ Since Detroit's 2013 bankruptcy, while some housing developments transformed entire city blocks into a modern version of the city, they simultaneously displaced native Detroiters. Similarly, whereas many folks argue the acquisition of new businesses and economic opportunities as indications of urban regeneration, their presence stokes anxiety among native Detroiters. In all, the advent of new housing, businesses and, perhaps most importantly, the influx of new citizens point to a reality that Detroit's present and its prospective future is not the Detroit of yesterday. Granted,

Detroit's condition previous to the Duggan administration was troublesome to say the least, but during Duggan's initial State of the City address, his promise to the people of Detroit was to restore a city that took advantage of and failed its own people. For these residents, the Detroiters who stuck by and stayed behind while others left, Duggan's earlier tone was one of hope for the neighborhoods and reviving the city's former glory. And whether or not he intended for these same people to feel left behind or overlooked during this period of dramatic revision, Duggan's current message for the 2018 State of the City and his successful 2017 Re-election campaign is "One Detroit for all of us."⁷ Now the question around Detroit is not whether or not it can change, as it has. Rather, those watching near and afar ask for whom is Detroit changing, and moreover, whose Detroit is driving the vision for the city's future? In other words, when Duggan and his partners imagine "One Detroit for all of us," what does this innovative version of Detroit look like, and who comprises the mayor's vision of "us?"

This dissertation examines how Detroit, a city space engaged in widespread redevelopment, struggles to retain a cultural identity from the past while somehow embracing the prospects of change tied to the renewal. In our study of human interaction, community mobility, and urban cultures, we come to appreciate that each city possesses distinct qualities that constitute its existence. This, however, is not to suggest that cities are static or fixed in their associated qualities; quite the contrary, city spaces remain open and malleable systems in which perpetual human engagement mark these unique spaces as organic and unfinished. What each city does possess is a collection of core cultural and traditional logics that cultivate public associations on a number of economic, social, or historical planes. For Detroit, recognizing that these embedded frameworks exist is a principle concern as the city takes on a

campaign of radical urban renewal following a prolonged period of decay. If we examine the connections between the entrenched cultural frameworks and the referential objects upholding their presence across Detroit, we see that these constitutive positions are especially complicated as they relate to the city's recovery. Turning to Detroit's past and the controversial events that shaped the city exposes this series of constitutive narratives grounded in racial tension, injustice, and resistance. Not only is Detroit a city distinguished by its working-class roots and gritty residents, it is also a space reflective of the complicated experience of black Americans and an ongoing struggle for racial equality in the United States. Like other significant episodes of our past, these experiences and their consequences are exhibited across Detroit vis-à-vis sites of public memory that anchor these narratives within the city's spatial reality. Hence, while Detroit's resurgence may overlook these sites and their associated friction as nothing more than benign aspects of a historically contentious city space, the truth is that these legacies reflect the destructive pitfalls that pulled Detroit from prosperity. Moreover, memories aligned with these sites illuminate racial injustices from Detroit's past that seem to have never been eradicated and are emerging once more under an all too familiar label: progress.

My project interrogates the contextual variables that merge together to produce our shared spaces of community and public experience. Detroit is an especially intriguing site because, as we consider the city's past and ongoing changes, we can understand how urban spaces retain apparent constructs of authenticity and the public response when such ideas are threatened. The impetus for this project then is an emergence of divisive discourse that appraises changes in Detroit in extremely different perspectives. One camp of residents, for example, embraces the wholesale changes that have emerged in the city, pointing to prominent

figures like billionaire Quicken Loans owner, Dan Gilbert, as agents of rapid progress for the city.⁸ For other residents and onlookers, the pursuit of progress has fostered a version of Detroit meant for the affluent, one that forsakes the very Detroiters that Mayor Duggan promised to center his efforts upon as he assumed office in 2014.⁹ Both viewpoints have their value along with the evidence to support their positions, but even still, their division illustrates the rift at the heart of Detroit.

This study examines the consequences of change, because while change is at some point or another inevitable, how change emerges has severe consequences on publics who inhabit these shifting spaces. For Detroiters, it is no secret that as their city fell to financial collapse and stood on the verge of ruin, tremendous reform would be necessary to save Detroit. But the problem at hand for Detroiters those concerned about both the city and its people is when we embrace totalizing and rapid change, what is the cost? We must take care not to immediately paint moments of change with the broad brush of progress, improvement, or recovery because, as several cases across the city illustrate, change has become a harbinger for distress. Look no further than Detroit's controversial housing redevelopment, which has brought sorrow for several pockets of residents. Mayor Duggan's platform since assuming office in 2014 has been to eradicate blight that has been allowed to spread throughout entire neighborhoods. The Duggan administration's solution has been an aggressive foreclosure, demolition, and redevelopment course of action that has yielded mixed results of growth but led to the displacement of hundreds.¹⁰ Changes to Detroit have also largely been to the benefit of younger, richer, and whiter populations, who slowly come to see the city as a potential space for economic opportunity.¹¹ As the city attracts these new communities, Duggan's efforts also

displace original inhabitants and render Detroit a city that is improving from everyone except for Detroiters themselves.

Boasting an 83 percent African American population, Detroit is an undeniably black city where the threat of gentrification must be accounted for when periods of change sweep the city.¹² Sentiment among these residents has been one of frustration with a belief that the bulk of improvement and progress for Detroit have been isolated to the downtown and Midtown parts of the city, falling short of addressing the majority of black residents who live along the city's vast reach of neighborhoods. Moreover, the influx of capital, energy, and public focus on the Midtown and downtown areas has attracted the flow of newcomers to the city, leaving many Detroiters wondering how the identity of Detroit has been lost or fractured in the clamor for change. For sociologist Meagan Elliot, "When certain types of people become more visible than others through our main media outlets, this strikes an imbalance that hits at the nerve of people's sense of place, their attachment to their communities, and their desire to keep Detroit as their home."¹³ People's sense of belonging in Detroit is a rhetorical production that positions the city as more than a city space, but a home, and the cultural associations that come with being a Detroiters. Thus, this study questions how cultural associations to Detroit are socially constructed, defined, and maintained across various material and discursive artifacts. Further, throughout this project, I consider how publics recognize spatial rhetorics of Detroit, and how those constructs play a role in shaping collective visions of identity and culture. To that end, the contentious changes across Detroit are of significance for this project as I trace the rhetorical interplay of this city as a space constituted by public memories that define what it means to be a Detroiters.

Given the contingencies at play when looking at Detroit's ongoing revitalization, several foundational questions drive this investigation on the intersection of critical cultural rhetoric, memory, and urban spatiality. Before engaging these questions directly however, I would like to preface these inquiries by framing this study as a project on the rhetorical underpinnings of memories and their productive role in constituting public spaces. To that end, this project proceeds down a path of building on the field's ongoing conversation toward productions of public space and the rhetorical means by which these spaces are composed. For Detroit, the collected memories of civil rights injustice and resistance play an essential function in the evolution of the city space, which will invariably return to focus as that very space transforms and revitalizes in the coming years. Moreover, since these sites of memory and the narratives they display are grounded in periods of civil rights injustice, Detroit becomes a unique American city space born from resistant sentiments.

The first issue raised in this study concerns the means with which public memory is recognized and evaluated as a mnemonic site. Therefore, I ask: how do sites, performances, and commemorative acts earn mnemonic value? Traditionally, the focus of public memory studies has been on officially sanctioned or commissioned works of memory, such as a larger memorial or dedicated structure.¹⁴ This study works to extend how we identify places of public memory to include sites of memory that become mnemonic over time despite their manifested purposes. Second, this project asks how iconic images or sites rhetorically produce cultural logics assigned to urban spaces like Detroit. Just as each city space becomes imbued with particularities for residents affiliated with these spaces, this project investigates how these ideas are informed and produced by specific markers within these places. Next, this study

contemplates how spaces are socially defined. In other words, when one recognizes their entry or exit of a space such as Detroit, what connotations come to mind? Furthermore, this question appeals to the judgments derived from my initial inquiries and begs us to attend to what degree sites of memory constitute city spaces and what cultural associations are produced by such memories. The fourth foundational question of this project focuses on the dynamics of temporality, asking: how do our socio-cultural associations of an urban space continue over time? This inquiry focuses on the endurance of cultural logics aligned to city spaces, particularly as cities change, and the ramifications of such change. Finally, the last subject of inquiry for this larger project considers how machinations of the past, be it narratives of memory, history, or legend, become tools for future use and justification for change.

In all, these questions driving my analysis appraise Detroit as the space of study to understand how this city in transition is either informed by or negligent of memories tied to sites of civil rights injustice. As Detroit continues its march toward revival following complete economic, social, and material upheaval, this project examines how objects of memory become the locus of recognizing the city space and cultures connected within its community. Thus, while Detroit's redevelopment is steeped in enthusiasm, these memory sites challenge newcomers and residents alike to remember how engrained the city's legacy is to the spirit of Detroit, regardless of change.

Review of Relevant Literature

This study makes several key contributions on rhetoric's principle function in the presence of collective memories and frameworks that allow memory to endure over time to preserve ideas of the past. Additionally, this project advances a critical approach to memory

studies, most notably through memory's connection to the rhetorical configurations that inform dominant or marginalized discourses of city spaces and the communities who occupy them. Following a growth of academic interest in commemorative practices, popular history, and public space, rhetorical scholars developed a burgeoning volume of works dedicated to the public function of memory.¹⁵ Investigating how the public remembers and commemorates historical events is vital to recognize how such communities are shaped by partisan versions of the past.¹⁶ The Civil Rights Movement has become an especially prominent focus of these works as we explore how episodes in history are remembered collectively and the divisive consequences when such legacies are remembered differently.¹⁷ Throughout these discussions, however, there exists a lack of scholarly attention toward chapters of civil rights injustice in the northern regions of the United States. As such, I situate this project within the growing collection of works that attends to more complicated memories of the black freedom struggle in the northern United States.¹⁸ From a range of academic work in historical and memory scholarship, we see how a limited scope of civil rights history shapes our perspectives of the civil right's struggle's settings and the current tensions these shortcomings produce. This study, then, isolates Detroit as its focus because of its connection to a web of civil rights memory, constitutive rhetoric, and cultural logics that converge to define Detroit as unique northern city space.

Focusing on the way sites of civil rights memory represent Detroit culture allows me to intervene in urban studies and cultural memory studies. Recent work on urban spatiality calls for work that illuminates urban renewal procedures and their consequences on contingent publics.¹⁹ For example, urban sociologists like Andreas Huyssen and Fran Tonkiss demonstrate

that as city spaces experience periods of dramatic change, whether positive or negative, they are unlikely to transition without a great deal of public and social contestation. Collective memories of a city space like Detroit are not easily revised, renewed, or wholly transformed, as they are perpetually informed by their history.²⁰ In other words, a city like Detroit does not simply give way to redevelopment or reimagination, but instead evolves from a previous condition informed by the markings of its past. These marks exist in the form of material sites that represent or are produced by traumatic episodes from the past. Specifically, various mnemonic sites exist that explain Detroit's history while also etching a cultural inscription upon the city space.

For these sites of public memory to maintain and shape Detroit's culture, I suggest that their rhetorical force is constitutive in nature. To argue that rhetoric has a constitutive power means that it creates collective identities such as community, nationality, or a collected "people."²¹ During its germinal applications, constitutive rhetoric studies often examined how public address shaped identity. However, the texts examined in constitutive rhetoric studies have expanded to investigate diverse artifacts such as performances, rituals, or songs.²² This project expands the range of artifacts that we may recognize as having constitutive functions. First, I offer a connection between the delineations of city space and mnemonic rhetorics across sites in Detroit that indicate the city's boundaries on both material and symbolic planes. Put another way, I describe ways in which Detroit's presence is rhetorically grounded in memory sites that constitute people's perceptions of affiliation, opportunity, or marginalization with the city. While previous work illustrates the rhetorical underpinnings of material objects across public spaces in communicating realities of accessibility, limitations, or discrimination,

my study turns to the constitutive potential of these materials.²³ Second, this project argues that narratives about collective memories of the past are constitutive. Memory is a formidable rhetorical force in producing the public threads that form our sense of selfhood. Memory studies have expanded in recent years, and from this boom has emerged a tangled web of memory's presence, applications, and influences over public discourse and identity. Several scholars, for example, consider how the presence of memory in public discourse engages the responsibility to learn from and preserve history's errors in terms of conflict, trauma, and violence.²⁴ Moreover, memory scholarship interrogates the function of memory in a socialized context as to productions of identity and collective cultures.²⁵ In line with these works, my aim with this project is to address memory's rhetorical role in social constructs of collective cultures and identify the constitutive function of memory in shaping identity.

While rhetorical scholars have recently turned their focus to collective memory studies, scholars from many fields have explored the subject since the early twentieth century. For instance, scholars, drawing from the works of Maurice Halbwachs, Sigmund Freud, and Emile Durkheim, have approached memory from a range of humanistic, neurological, sociological, and technological frames of analysis.²⁶ Recent scholarship has examined how public memory functions as the purposeful, selected, and oftentimes politicized retelling of the past in order to meet the demand of the present.²⁷ Moreover, a connection between memory studies and the work of critical theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida suggests that narratives of memory work as an ontological origin in positioning our subjective identities and ideological frameworks.²⁸ These connections are exciting lines of inquiry in relation to Detroit because

much like the origins of how we define ourselves is tied to fragments of memory, I argue that a similar process is rhetorically occurring in our reading of city spaces.

A great deal of attention has been paid to how public memory is manifested in public sites such as memorials and commemorative sites.²⁹ While this work has been important to our understanding of how public commemoration operates, it too often focuses on officially sanctioned memorials or museums that are built for the purposes to commemorate. My project seeks to expand the study of public memory by examining sites that were not originally created for commemorative ends, but become so through a shift in their social meaning over time. Thus, it is important to consider the contingent nature of public memory discourse and how it transforms with shifts in society. In sum, I am interested in exploring how mnemonic sites gain meaning and value through the process of becoming. Social theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Walter Benjamin provide us with the foundation to understand the contingent nature of rhetoric and meaning, which allows objects to emerge with shifts in the configuration of the social.³⁰ Scholarship that draws from these critical theorists demonstrate that objects like memorials or public spaces are not static in meaning; shifts in social structures can consequently transform the mnemonic value of sites.³¹ Because rhetorical and public memory studies have done limited work to examine how public memory sites have emerged with shifts in time and structures, this project explores how sites transform organically into public memory spaces. I am interested in understanding what role the public plays in the emergence of such organic memory sites and what impact these kinds of commemorative spaces have on the identity of urban spaces.

Analytic Framework and Procedures

The study of the rhetoric of emergent public memory is challenging, as this work is complicated by problems of temporality and cultural marginalization. By this, I mean that work such as this struggles under the weight of temporality where the strength of mnemonic discourses will inevitably fade over time. John Bodnar highlights this struggle as he distinguishes public memory from history.³² Bodnar notes that unofficial or vernacular discourses are vulnerable to change and diminished meaning over time. Vernacular memory is more of a localized memory, something maintained and shared within a community. In comparison, official discourse of public memory is state-sanctioned acts, texts, or sites of recollection that typically operate as traditional history. Unlike vernacular memory, official public memory often remains static over time and it may differ from localized recollection of events. Using this distinction, my project explores vernacular sites of memory precisely because they are prone to change. Moreover, I want to investigate how communities have different memories about events, particularly traumatic or controversial ones, compared to official accounts. I am also curious as to how some of these places become officially sanctioned memory sites or are co-opted by governmental agencies, which further transforms the meaning and value of these locations.

Temporality is a significant factor in this study. Public memory is dramatically shaped and lost with the passage of time. Several studies note the importance of temporality in the constitution of collective memory, communities, and lived spaces.³³ In relation to public memory of traumatic moments in time, public discourse often implores communities to “move on,” as the events of the past are behind them, and that they should move forward. Thus, this

project explores how discourses about time are used to justify the preservation, selection, and erasure of certain memories about the civil right struggle. These discourses of urgency and temporality and the meaning of Detroit's vernacular and official civil rights commemorative sites must be read with a rich appreciation for the historical contexts that inform these spaces. To adequately determine how sites like vernacular and official objects and sites like homes, streets, statues, and walls become mnemonic spaces, the contextual histories that surround these objects and spaces are important to explore to understand how they constitute the city and its residents. As I examine the rhetorical features of various Detroit commemorative sites, I compare the present-day meaning and value of these spaces with their historical origins and the economic, political, and social developments that lead to their emergence as key sites in the civil rights struggle.

As I read Detroit's civil rights history through these objects and sites, it is important to note that most traditional civil rights narratives portray Detroit, and many other northern cities, as places of progressive values that were untainted by the kinds of racism witnessed in the south.³⁴ James Loewen argues that a traditional, mythologized, and northern-centric civil rights narrative typically fails to criticize the structural and personal racial injustices committed in cities like Detroit.³⁵ Therefore, I read civil rights commemorative sites in Detroit to locate neglected and counter-hegemonic vernacular memories of systemic racism and injustices that are manifest or absent in the sites and how these memories shape our understanding of Detroit in the present. I approach these sites as contested spaces and examine how present and absent rhetorical features shape the spatial discourses that shape Detroit and its identity.

To explore the rhetorical function of these commemorative sites, I understand rhetoric as constitutive in nature and as such, memory to be a constitutive thread in public discourse. A considerable volume of rhetorical scholarship has been dedicated to the constitutive potential of rhetorical narratives that convey senses of belonging or identity. Michael Calvin McGee, for example, explains the constitutive power in conveying unifying frameworks such as “the people.”³⁶ Moreover, Campbell and Jamieson’s work advances the field’s perspective toward the rhetorical nature of discourses that fashion visions of collectivity and community.³⁷ And projects like that of Maurice Charland’s build upon our understanding of rhetoric from functioning primarily through direct persuasion or rational choice to how we form identity through created associations. In examining the rhetorical articulation of the *people québécois* in calls for Québécois independence, Charland applies Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser’s notion of interpellation to argue that constitutive rhetoric hails subjects into being and to identify with others. These acts of identification operate ideologically from a set of discursive positions associated with people’s lived experiences. While these scholars primarily focused on constitutive rhetorics conveyed through speech acts, I posit a more expansive understanding as to how these narratives are found in public discourse, specifically in memory. Just as scholars like Gronbeck or Vivian tell us, the contested nature of public memory in relation to traditional history distorts the same notions of collective community and redirect the constitutive foundations of our social identities. Across this project, I turn to public memory narratives as displayed in material sites across the city to analyze the constitutive narratives they deploy. Moreover, I examine how these memory sites preserve constitutive rhetorics of Detroit’s past

to determine their presence impacts a redevelopment that threatens to undermine the public culture these narratives cultivate.

I also examine how Detroit mnemonic sites operate as a source of material resistance to change. As vernacular memories of the space become concretized into memory spaces, their meaning and ideologies cannot be overwritten easily. I contend that we should understand these commemorative spaces through the metaphor of a palimpsest. A metaphor used most often in the study of archaeology, architecture, and geography, the concept of a palimpsest has enormous cultural and rhetorical potential when we examine periods of change in urban places. Developed first in ancient times, the palimpsest was the cleaning of parchment for reuse later. Over time, the original inscriptions would reappear as they were embedded into the text. In contemporary times, a palimpsest is understood as something akin to a writer's error or accidental blemish that can be erased to open the possibility for future change in the same space where a notation was made. This erasure cannot completely wipe away the presence of previous markings; indentations exist, shadows of our previous markings endure, and we are left with a canvas that forever displays the markings of the past. These remainders transform the text from a clean slate to a palimpsest, a space that has been repurposed and reimagined.

In analyzing the function of Detroit civil rights memory sites, I explore how they function like a palimpsest. While each memory site examined in this project exists on its own merit and bears a history worth remembering, these sites create a web of constitutive mnemonics that carve a permanent marking on the city. I describe the marking as a palimpsest, a base where previous etchings prevail despite efforts to erase their presence. While applications of

palimpsest analyses are primarily carried out in geographical or anthropological scholarship, scholars illustrate how the palimpsest metaphor carries implications to our appreciation of a past that is always present.³⁸ My interest is in examining how these mnemonic sites act as sources of rhetorical remnants that prevent erasure and closure of the past. As discourses of temporality seek immediate revitalization and redevelopment of Detroit, I investigate how these memory sites complicate these efforts to bring closure to Detroit's past in order to move forward. This contingency ensures that cultural engravings on the city space cannot be unwritten or dismissed, and are certain to play a role in the city's future.

Chapter Previews

This study investigates salient episodes of civil rights resistance in Detroit to uncover how these moments are remembered or forgotten and the constitutive consequences they present. I begin this analysis in Chapter Two by exploring one of Detroit's earliest twentieth-century moments of civil rights resistance, the Ossian Sweet incident. This historical moment is explored by analyzing the rhetoric found at *The Ossian Sweet House* monument, a commemorative site dedicated to the bravery and accomplishment of black Detroiters who fought against housing injustice. This site is of interest to me because the house did not begin as a commemorative site. While it has been preserved, it lacks the features of an official memory space and is not open to the public. I begin the chapter by reviewing the controversial history of the Ossian Sweet incident and unjust housing policies leading to a violent encounter where Sweet would initially be charged with murder for defending his home against white intruders. After examining the aftermath of the 1926 Ossian Sweet trial, I explore how the presence of the Sweet house adjacent to the abandonment and widespread blight of the city's

east side haunts the mnemonic landscape of Detroit. As the city of Detroit attempts to rebuild, the Ossian Sweet House stands as a site of material rhetoric that anchors the city to its legacy that cannot be overwritten.

Chapter Three examines a material barrier that represented the significant cultural, economic, and legal barriers to housing equality. In this chapter, I analyze the presence of the 8 Mile Wall, a barrier installed in 1941 to block a black neighborhood from a nearby portion of land intended to become an all-white housing development. Whereas Chapter Two considers threats made against black residents through real estate or legislative means, this chapter examines how the configuration of a city's space can operate to maintain or resist similar types of discrimination. I contend that the 8 Mile Wall is a material memory site that discursively and materially afflicts black residents with discriminatory consequences. The 8 Mile Wall, however, is fascinating because its manifested origins are in no way to commemorate or memorialize an important historical moment. Instead, it was a symbol of hatred and discrimination. However, over time, residents and artists have reclaimed the space, by painting important memories and depictions on the wall. In exploring this act of appropriation of space, this chapter contributes to the field of public memory studies by investigating how controversial sites can become a contested, vernacular, and counter-hegemonic mnemonic places over time. In theorizing this transformation of the space, this chapter introduces the idea of emergent memory, a rhetorical procedure of studying how sites of public memory earn mnemonic value despite their origins and how such values can be redirected or revised over time.

Chapter Four examines memories of perhaps the most influential event to ever occur in Detroit: the 1967 uprising. I approach the legacy of the 1967 uprising by assessing how the

turbulent events are remembered or, perhaps more importantly, forgotten. Here, I investigate how the city responded to the events of the 1967 uprising in a way that relegated the memory of 1967 to the periphery of public consciousness through discourses of absence, presence, and naming. I do this by examining the absent space where the Algiers Motel existed – the location where a series of killings triggered days of social unrest. I also explore how that space is now used, as the motel was demolished shortly after the summer of 1967 and Gordon Park was established in its place. I investigate how this new space contains just one marker acknowledging the events of 1967 and how the absence of the motel affects public memories of 1967. Additionally, I consider how the nearby 12th Street, the prime location for the 1967 uprising, was renamed after civil rights icon, Rosa Parks, and how this distorts recollection of 1967. As the city recently witnessed the 50th anniversary of the uprising, I examine the attempts to reflect on what led to the uprising and their consequences thereafter. However, I contend that these efforts fell short because of the rhetorical distortions that shaped our remembrance of the events. As a result, I contend that a form of public amnesia blocks our ability to reconcile the events of 1967, which has broad implications on the city.

In Chapter Five, I examine the world-famous monument, *The Fist*. Officially known as The Monument to Joe Louis, *The Fist* has become something of a cultural icon for Detroit's residents and those who see Detroit from the outside. Despite its origins as a memorial to the life and career of famed boxer Joe Louis, the structure projects several discourses about defiance and resistance to rapid transformation and racist ideologies. I read the monument by examining its physical features and its proximity to several mnemonic spaces in the heart of downtown. Additionally, I analyze several texts that carry similar cultural veins as *The Fist*, like

the t-shirt slogans “Detroit Hustles Harder” and “Detroit v. Everybody,” along with Chrysler’s 2011 Super Bowl commercial, “Born of Fire,” which features *The Fist*. These analyses consider how the monument is rhetorical imbued with meaning by these discourses of resistance, and how these meanings extend from *The Fist* to other artifacts over time. I contend that *The Fist* operates as a localized palimpsest that marks the mnemonic surface of Detroit and constantly disrupts attempts to erase Detroit’s identity and memories for the sake of economic development.

Overall, this project focuses on material sites of civil rights memory throughout Detroit to reveal how public memory spaces operate constitutively through discourse about temporality, presence, spatiality, and defiance. This study contributes to the study of public memory rhetoric by examining vernacular mnemonic spaces that have been understudied thus far. In doing so, the project offers new insights into how emergent spaces of memory and absence shape public memory and collective identity. Moreover, this study makes a significant contribution to the rhetorical treatment of spatiality, arguing that Detroit, as an urban space, is informed and defined by significant sites of memory that carry the legacies of the historical moments that transformed the city. These rhetorical underpinnings, which I describe as constitutive mnemonics, are embedded in the very foundations of the city space, which will undoubtedly affect the city’s future as Detroit is currently undergoing several transitions. While previous studies have considered how commemorative sites articulate partisan versions of history, my project reveals the diverse ways in which public memories manifest in across a range of untraditional texts and spaces and how they operate together to shape memories of the past. Lastly, this study contributes to our understanding of how rhetorics of time and

mnemonic spaces intersect. Many of the public spaces that I examine did not begin as memory sites. Instead, they were traumatic sites meant to maintain hegemonic racial order. My project explores how these spaces have been transformed by time and by local actors to become emergent memory spaces that have new meaning and value in current times.

Notes

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Chapter 2 HAUNTING MEMORY: THE OSSIAN SWEET HOUSE

To Detroit's east-side at the intersection of Garland and Charlevoix Avenue sits a structure that represents the presence of the city's past and the promise of its future, a concurrent symbol of both growth and decay. As a whole, Detroit sits in a paradox of reaching out for a future it desperately desires while holding onto a past it refuses to release. As such, public discourse on the state of the city recognizes a complicated dual-role it holds in public memory. One of these roles is its former standing as the center of rapid industrial progress in the United States, where Detroit's memory is one as the arsenal of democracy with determined resolve during World War II.¹ The second, however, is a troubling memory of racial tensions that haunt the city and the nation's efforts to move forward from a shameful legacy of discrimination and widespread decline. As the city rebounds from the economic fallout of the 2013 bankruptcy, a litany of issues are recognized as precursors for Detroit's decay. Complicated struggles with police brutality, education, and economic inequality undergird discussions of Detroit's checkered history. While each of these forces bear responsibility for Detroit's current predicament, perhaps no issue has shaped the city like housing segregation.² Unequal housing continues to be a shadow for the Motor City, a specter of entrenched racial disparity in a place ironically recognized for its diversity in the early 1900s.

Martin Luther King Jr. would reference housing injustice during his June 1963 speech at the Detroit Walk to Freedom, a precursor to his famous March on Washington address later that summer. "I have a dream this afternoon that one day right here in Detroit, Negroes will be able to buy a house or rent a house anywhere that their money will carry them," he proclaimed.³ The statement struck a chord with Detroiters, since the struggle for housing was an

issue Detroiters knew all too well. In the same speech, King reminds us, “Now in the North it’s different in that it doesn’t have the legal sanction that it has in the South. But it has its subtle and hidden forms and it exists in...housing segregation.”⁴ King was right, housing segregation was a subtle, elusive, and festering force in areas like Detroit long before Rosa Parks entered a bus or King rallied the nation. For Detroit, prior to the attention surrounding the 1960s movement, heroism of civil rights defiance begins with the tale of Ossian Sweet and his modest bungalow on the corner of Garland and Charlevoix. The story of Ossian Sweet signals the long struggle for civil rights in Detroit and is commemorated today by the very house he defended in 1925, a structure that reminds us that we must “remember not to forget.”⁵ The Sweet house is one of over 1400 monuments in the state of Michigan, but for Detroit, it is a place of particular importance as a space where black families began to resist the subtle strategies to stall their opportunities for a good life.⁶ This chapter focuses on public memory attributed to the house, and the intriguing role these memories play in our more complicated recognition of the civil rights struggle in northern spaces. I contend that legacies associated with housing equality, legal progress, and features of Detroit’s cultural character is inscribed in the Sweet House today. As such, this chapter interrogates these dynamics to advance the position that the Sweet House is an integral memory site of Detroit’s urban identity.

In a September night that resulted in one white man’s death and another injured as they invaded the Sweet House, nine black men including Ossian were booked on murder charges. Sweet’s murder trial would end in a hung jury in November 1925 but in April the following year, the trial of Ossian’s brother, Henry Sweet resulted in acquittal and the entire case was dropped.⁷ The Sweet family escaped murder charges and Judge Frank Murphy delivered a

landmark decision that black families had a right to defend their homes from intruders. Ossian Sweet eventually moved back into the house in 1930, but ultimately lost the house to back-taxes in the late 1950s. In 1958, Herbert Baxter, a man who knew Ossian well, purchased the home for \$1000 and became only the third black family ever to move onto the block. Today, the house is still occupied by the Baxters and has been granted landmark as a historical monument, solidifying its place in Detroit and American history.⁸ The rhetorical force of the 1925 trial and the Sweet House had a profound impact on the city at the time and still assumes implications toward issues of housing, the Castle Doctrine, and civil rights resistance.

Everyday structures like the Ossian Sweet house are important markers for modern public memory studies because they are traditionally overlooked as subjects of analysis. While an explosion in memory scholarship toward the end of the twentieth century brought a wealth of analysis on sites of memory, their gazes were mostly fixed on state sanctioned memorials or edifices built for commemoration.⁹ If we look beyond these purposeful attempts to etch mnemonic narratives into stone, we see other meaningful sites that equally exert rhetorical force of remembering significant moments. Such is the case for the Sweet house, where visitors to the site engage the complex position of the house's protected presence in Detroit's decaying surroundings. While the house is well kept and adorned with national markers detailing its history, the surrounding area is a dark reminder of the poverty that has stricken the city.

This complicated dynamic to the Sweet house invites our inquiry as to how recovering cities like Detroit make sense of the symbols of the past that serve as a foundation for the future. The question is a confounding one, as local reporters and investors envision a 'New Detroit' that moves forward from its troubled past and rebuilds on its desolate ruins. But

scholars like Derrida, Huyssen, and Massey demonstrate that this process is not so simple, and the presence of the past begets a palimpsest for redeveloping urban spaces.¹⁰ More specifically, Derrida describes how sentiments of the past may haunt, linger, and return to focus in his discussion of hauntology and cultural specters. Hauntology, he tells us, is the manner in which we inherit the past and our present experiences are then shaped by the guise of memories. As such, this analysis considers the Sweet house not only from its current position as a peculiar monument in an otherwise ruined urban space, but as key material vestige in a city changing before our very eyes.

Simply put, the Ossian Sweet case is one of the early landmarks in America's legal system regarding civil rights. While I explore these legacies a contextual survey to follow, the ruling on Sweet's acquittal is one of the first instances where a black American was ruled to lawfully protect themselves and their homes, even from whites. Known at the time as the "Castle Doctrine," the decision was a progressive breakthrough for Clarence Darrow and the NAACP.¹¹ The case is one of the earliest instances where contested housing policies ended in favor of a black defendant, a benchmark that drives much of the NAACP's celebrated legal victories during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. The markers in the yard of the Sweet House note these advancements, and the house stands as a unique site signifies the affective traumatic sentiments attached to housing inequality and the elation of defeating such injustices. Therefore, while the house and its case hold ramifications for the urban culture of Detroit, it has similar temporal influences on public perspectives of the larger civil rights struggle as well.

Recently, public memory scholars have turned their attention to sites dedicated to legal victories like the Civil Rights Monument in Montgomery.¹² Others explore monuments to historical figures or somber reflections on the site of a controversial event from long ago.¹³ But few studies examine sites that offer appeals to legal controversies in objects other than marble figures or artistic renderings. Specifically, there is a lack in scholarship that considers how the sites of ordinary life become the settings of injustice, contestation, and significance in our memories of civil rights progress. I argue that the Sweet House is one such location, making it a unique starting point in studying the memories of housing segregation for Detroit. The house is provocative and complicated, ordinary but abnormal, making it a paradoxical figure of civil rights memory and Detroit spatiality. This site asks us to question how a material space can hold numerous memories that span subjects like racism while simultaneously carrying implications of civic pride and segregated resistance. Similarly, tales of memory invite us to consider how the events of Ossian Sweet's harrowing story either operate within or challenge the traditional narrative of the Civil Rights Movement.

Therefore, I turn to the Ossian Sweet house to examine how its legacy challenges ongoing attempts to materially demolish and symbolically cleanse its surrounding space. This chapter is organized by first turning to the circumstances of Ossian Sweet and the events leading up and following his murder trial. Afterwards I analyze how the Ossian Sweet house rhetorically emerges as a site of memory, but particularly as a site of complicated and polarized memories bound to sentiments of both pain and joy. In this way, the house becomes a material fixture of the past, protected by its landmark designations but binding the neighborhood to a past that persists even though most of its remains have faded away. As a structure that holds

onto the past as its present surroundings shift, I suggest that its memory haunts the city, in that Ossian Sweet and the legacy of housing injustice are a specter hanging over Detroit. Finally, this chapter ponders how this site and sites like it place a mark on the city that cannot be removed, one that transforms the very space of Detroit. To this end, the memory associated with the Sweet House is one in many that bolsters our interpretation of Detroit as an urban palimpsest, a space whose past etches irremovable markings on the city as it engages in a widespread redevelopment.

A Different Detroit

While the Sweet case seems like a minor civil rights conflict in comparison to the popularized King-centric civil rights narrative, a closer look tells a more nuanced story. Ossian Sweet's fight to defend his home is one of the significant civil rights moments for both Detroit and the country. During the 1920s, Detroit was a key urban space in the larger civil rights struggle as southern black families commenced a mass migration north to escape conditions of the Jim Crow south.¹⁴ During this time, Detroit's population exploded with black and migrant families looking to take advantage of growing manufacturing opportunities in the city. 1920s Detroit was building off expansions to the automobile industry and companies like the Ford Motor Company employed scores of black workers through the "five dollar day" program.¹⁵ In all, the possibilities for a steady income and release from contentious southern racism brought an influx of black residents. As a result, Detroit transformed immediately as shifts in residential demographics brought networks of new cultures and different perspectives to a city where many of its older, whiter residents were less open to communities of difference.

To meet the influx of families moving to the city, Detroit confronted its housing problems through three informal strategies, easing anxieties of white residents who demanded something be done to retain residential segregation. For a city that was not accustomed to such a large number of non-white communities, maintaining social order was a concern for officials and citizens alike. The advent of the five-dollar day brought profits for Ford as well as white foremen and managers, but also installed a sense of anxiety as whites refused to work or live near their black peers. On the issue of living spaces, the city took part in many covert practices that maintained clear racial distinctions for Detroit. First, white neighborhoods prevented the inclusion of black neighbors through the use of restrictive covenants throughout the city. These covenants were policies commonly written into housing contracts and deeds, establishing that the houses themselves could not be sold or rented out to black families. While these restrictions were mostly effective, every so often a black family would move in despite their existence, often met with conflict or prosecution by white neighbors citing the covenant.¹⁶ While most neighborly disputes could be resolved through cool-headed mediation, restrictive covenants were enforceable by law. As such, these covenants usually prevented black families from moving into properties and if a covenant was violated, the family was usually removed by force. Restrictive covenants were the backbone in American housing segregation in city spaces at the turn of the 20th century, leaving a scar on the country arguably still exists.¹⁷ This obtrusive strategy worked for decades before finally being deemed unconstitutional by the 1948 *Shelley v Kraemer* decision, a case built from the unjust instances of housing covenants in cities like Detroit.

Second, in tandem with restrictive covenants were informal policing bodies in the city, neighborhood improvement associations. Typically made up of anxious neighbors concerned about property values, these groups were often led by members of the KKK, especially in Detroit.¹⁸ Michigan boasted one of the largest chapters of the KKK during the 1920s, and their neighborhood improvement associations were effective in intimidating black families into vacating homes they had recently purchased. Improvement associations would regularly hold rallies in neighborhoods feeling threatened that black families were “invading” their space. In the auditoriums of schools or parks, these gatherings were militant in nature, arguing that white families needed to defend their communities from the threat of hosting black neighbors. While residential uncertainties sometimes surrounded violence or crime, most white families were concerned with how the inclusion of black neighbors hurt property values over time. Neighborhood associations took advantage of these worries, using fear mongering and economic uncertainties to recommend violent responses that innately preserved white supremacy.

Finally, cities like Detroit took part in a systematic practice known as ‘racial steering,’ where realtors and development companies deliberately adjusted rental and property prices to ensure that black families could not afford certain homes.¹⁹ While the NAACP recognized that unlawful racial steering was targeting blacks to live isolated among one another in decaying spaces, legally challenging them was difficult due to their subtle and indirect application. While the more formalized practice of redlining did not go into effect until the National Housing Act of 1934, the informal custom of bracketing off restricted sections of cities began well before with the increase in non-white communities.²⁰ Continued racial steering led to large communities

like Detroit's Black Bottom and Paradise Valley neighborhoods, centralized black communities that were several miles from white developments. Oftentimes, if a black family applied to purchase or rent a home not bound to a restrictive covenant, realtors would gouge its price, thus steering the family away. It was common practice to take the prices of homes and charge black buyers 30-50 percent more if they wished to move to one of the predominantly white neighborhoods.²¹ Racial steering was common in cities like Chicago, Milwaukee, and Detroit where the strategy left distinct spatial markings in the form of divisive cultural borders that signaled connotations of safety or opportunity to its residents.

Together, these strategies made for an uphill battle as black families sought to improve their living conditions in the wake of the great migration north. Yet, the traditional civil rights narrative sees little focus toward northern states and their discriminatory strategies with issues like housing. Raiford and Romano argue that despite these deliberate efforts to challenge opportunities for black Americans, northern states are rarely of scholarly focus in critical engagements of history or civil rights memory. Scholars like Raiford and Romano suggest that we return to the legacy of these northern sites like Detroit to extend our understanding of the larger civil rights struggle and their residual implications today.²² As a city celebrated for its allegedly northern virtues throughout the black freedom struggle, Detroit is host to several disturbing tales of racially charged injustice that go unseen in popular retellings. While these legacies are frequently overlooked, their memories are captured in sites of ordinary life like the Ossian Sweet house. Analyzing these artifacts reveals complex rhetorical dynamics that expose nuances to the traditional civil rights narrative that challenges Detroit's perceived role in civil rights progress. Further, memories associated with the house underscore the implications of

memory over time, as the Ossian Sweet house illustrates how an otherwise unremarkable space generates an array of consequences that return to focus as the city's foundations are revised.

The Sweet Life

While Ossian Sweet may have become a civil rights symbol for Detroiters in 1925, his experience with racial tension dates back to a troubled early childhood. Ossian Sweet was born in 1895 to Dora and Henry Sweet in a small house his father built in Bartow, Florida. Ossian's grandfather, Remus DeVaughn, regularly recounted his experiences as a slave, warning the Sweet children about the nature of white folks in America. Apart from Devaughn's cautionary tales, Ossian witnessed the lynching of Fred Rochelle in 1901 as he hid in the bushes and watched while Rochelle was hung and then lit on fire.²³ During his own trial 24 years later, Sweet recounted the scent of Rochelle's burning body and the young man's screams with great detail. As a teenager, Ossian left Florida in 1909 out of a fear of the growing Jim Crow tensions that he and his family regularly encountered. The Sweet family landed in Ohio but soon after, Ossian moved to Washington, DC to attend Howard University for medical school. Despite moving several hundred miles from the racial tensions of his upbringing, Ossian quickly learned that America's racial crisis was not bound to state lines.

In 1919, Ossian was a medical student halfway through his studies at Howard when the nation's capital hit a breaking point of racial unrest. That July, violence erupted in the streets in what would eventually become the Washington Race Riot of 1919.²⁴ Conflict swept across the city streets for four days before finally coming to an end as a massive rainstorm extinguished the flames across the city. While Ossian was not an active participant in the riot, scenes of

white and black folks alike attacking one another “reopened the wound [from] Bartow years before.”²⁵ After finishing his medical degree in the spring of 1921, Sweet left the DC area to look for a place where he could build a name and fortune for himself as a physician. Returning to Bartow or Xenia appealed to Ossian, but he ultimately decided to move to Detroit to open this new chapter in his life. Six years earlier, the Sweet family traveled to the Motor City, where Ossian was told that Detroit “awarded the ambitious.”²⁶ The prospect proved to be alluring, and Ossian packed his bags and moved to Detroit in 1921 and his ambitions were certainly put to the test.

Just over a year after relocating, Ossian married his wife, Gladys, and his hopes to build a family of his own began to take shape. The young couple then moved out of the Gladys’ family home to Detroit’s Black Bottom, where Ossian was once again reminded that the color of his skin was being used against him. In order to succeed in a line of work dominated mostly by white men, he knew he needed further education and so in 1923, the Sweet’s moved to Europe where the couple welcomed their daughter as Ossian finished his studies.²⁷ After returning to Detroit in 1924, the Sweet’s began saving their money as Ossian set his sites on a bungalow at the corner of Garland and Charlevoix. On June 7, the Sweets signed the purchase agreement on the 2905 Garland property to go along with the \$3,500 down payment. The initial payment was 30% higher than similar homes, but the Sweets were excited that in three months, they would be moving into a new home. In Sweet’s eyes, his ambition was finally paying off.

The summer leading up to the move was tense in the Garland neighborhood. Residents heard rumors that the bungalow sold on the corner of the street was purchased by a black man, but hard evidence was difficult to come by. The Garland community was mostly white working

class Detroiters concerned with making ends meet and finding a degree of financial stability in their tight-knit neighborhood. On July 14, the neighborhood held a mass meeting at the elementary school where the Tireman Avenue Improvement Association was invited to deliver the keynote on how to protect the neighborhood from the “black threat.” The Tireman group was notorious but effective.²⁸ Over the previous month, three instances of black families trying to move into white neighborhoods arose where, each time, the Tireman group successfully drove them out by force. The message of the meeting was clear: white families needed to protect their homes by any means necessary. White families, local Klansmen, and concerned neighbors attended the meeting, all inspired by the message of protection. The head of the Tireman Improvement Association closed the meeting with a firm call to, “use legal means if possible, force if necessary. But put the niggers out. Put them out.”²⁹ The entire assembly cheered.

Ossian and Gladys woke up the morning of September 8 prepared for the abnormal day to come. Ossian was aware of the inevitable resistance that was sure to come from buying the Garland house, but meetings with local officials and the NAACP assured him that he took the necessary steps to lawfully secure the property. In other words, no restrictive covenant or discriminatory procedure barred the Sweet’s from owning the home. The moving day was anticlimactic as movers carried furniture and possessions into the house throughout the afternoon while the neighbors remained fairly quiet. Police were stationed along the street, and as more of Ossian’s friends came to assist the family, stirs in the neighborhood became noticeable. As children began walking through the street, staring into the Sweet home, Ossian

noticed neighbors peering from their windows. Nothing came of the commotion that night, but a clear message was sent to the Sweets: they were not welcome.

Gladys and their daughter, Iva, stayed with a relative the following evening. Sensing trouble to come the night of September 9, Ossian asked that Gladys stay somewhere safe while he and nine of his friends stayed in the house to ensure that no one vandalized his new home. By sundown, a crowd collected outside the Sweet house, dense with white men angrily shouting epithets and pelting the building with rocks. As more men poured into the crowd, violence ignited the men began shattering windows and forged ahead on the steps of 2905 Garland.³⁰ As the white mob breached the front door, a window on the bungalow flat opened, and one of the black men in the house aimed a pistol into the crowd. Shots rang out in the chaos as two white men, Leon Breiner and Eric Houghberg, were shot. Police finally arrived on the scene as Breiner died from the gunshot wound and Houghberg was rushed away in an ambulance. By ten o'clock that evening, Ossian and his nine companions were arrested and booked in the Detroit police station after being charged with murder.

News of the shooting spread quickly and as Sweet looked to mount a defense for the fight of his life, the NAACP took notice. In October, esteemed lawyer Clarence Darrow took on the case and a national spectacle began as his defense team argued Sweet was within his legal rights to defend his home. Darrow had a reputation as a brilliant lawyer in legal circles and he saw in the Sweet case an opportunity unlike any other as a real step in civil rights progress hung in the balance. The Sweet trial began on October 30 with Judge Frank Murphy presiding over a case that gripped the national spotlight. Eventually, Ossian's case ended in a mistrial, turning focus to his brother, Henry Sweet. Henry's trial was much shorter than Ossian's and, on April

19, 1926, all of the defendants in the Sweet case were acquitted. The trial was an exhausting process for Ossian and his family, but his acquittal was widely recognized as a crack in the armor of white supremacy.³¹ Under the protections of the Castle Doctrine, Darrow successfully argued a stance that today is recognized as the “stand your ground” laws. Ossian and his family were free to live in the Garland bungalow, but the damage of the trial would take a toll on their immediate future.

During the trial, Gladys and Iva contracted tuberculosis, which many believe resulted from an extended incarceration following the shooting at the bungalow as Gladys and young Iva were held in custody. Following the trial, Ossian and Gladys decided not to stay in the home on Garland. After boarding the home up, Ossian moved into an apartment and Gladys moved to Tucson, Arizona to nurse her health. Iva died as a result of her tuberculosis in August following the acquittals and two years later, Gladys passed away as well. Ossian’s life spiraled downward after losing Gladys, but moved back to 2905 Garland in 1928. He stayed in the house for thirty years, eventually selling the home because of property tax struggles. Ossian relocated to a small apartment above his pharmacy where, on March 20, 1960, he shot himself in the head.

A Sweet Legacy

While this chapter focuses on the rhetorical consequences of the Sweet House in Detroit memory following the case, it is important to consider how Ossian Sweet’s struggle challenged the legal system and our traditional perceptions of history in popular culture and academia. First, the Ossian Sweet trial was one of the first instances of a legal ruling in favor of a black defendant on the grounds of the Castle Doctrine. The Castle Doctrine is a law that grants individuals the right to use deadly force in an effort to “protect their castle.”³² In other words,

the law protects a person if they use deadly force to stop an intruder from entering their home, which, in 1926, was a landmark victory for equal rights on fronts of gun possession and self-defense for black Americans. While Ossian's life post-ruling met a tragic end, his defiance was a massive step forward in the NAACP's protections for black families. Judge Murphy's ruling signaled to whites and blacks alike that no one had the right to simply invade another person's home, especially on the grounds of race. The Castle Doctrine has evolved since the 1926 ruling from state to state and has been a central edict in civil rights debates. This same law would become the foundation for what is today known as "stand your ground" laws, the defense used to defend George Zimmerman in his 2013 trial for killing Trayvon Martin.³³ As such, the Castle Doctrine's ruling in the Sweet case carries a complicated legacy for the civil rights struggle.

Additionally, the Sweet trial is recognized as a key moment in the long fight to dismantle racially restrictive housing covenants in Detroit and across the United States. Sweet's case, along with a similar 1944 Detroit trial, *McGhee v Sipes*, became the backbone of the 1948 ruling that declared restrictive covenants unconstitutional. In *Shelley v Kraemer*, the companion rulings in favor of the Sweet and McGhee were integral in defending the rights of prospective black homeowners. The Sweet and McGhee incidents in Detroit are commemorated with national markers and reflect the essential role that spaces like an ordinary house have in the extraordinary unfolding of civil rights history. While memory scholars usually focus on larger productions designed to commemorate historical progress or human rights victories, these Detroit houses signify the initial fractures in an otherwise impenetrable system of housing segregation. Thus, while memory of the Ossian Sweet house invites audiences to fix their attention on the Sweet family's experiences of 1925, they equally appeal to the number of civil

rights and housing victories that emerge after as a result of Sweet's defiant courage to protect his home.

Finally, consider as well how the presence of public memories attributed to the Sweet house challenge the popularized narrative of the Civil Rights Movement. As noted by recent historiographers and academics, the timeline of the civil rights struggle begins well before 1954 and continued long after 1968 as it is typically assigned. Instead, we should remember how America's black freedom struggle initiates long before *Brown v Board* and continues today in what Jacquelyn Dowd Hall names the "Long Civil Rights Movement."³⁴ The complexities of the Sweet case support this reinterpretation where Ossian Sweet, a black man in 1920s America, stood up to racial discrimination and won. Sweet is a civil rights icon for his struggle to overcome housing discrimination in 1925 and as we continue to interrogate the struggle for civil rights in Detroit, we must note how his case expands the temporal limitations we regularly place on the Civil Rights Movement. Rather than whittle the movement down to a 14-year period couched in Supreme Court rulings, memories like Sweet's ask that we extend our evaluations of the movement to equally appreciate struggles in the north in concert with the infamous conflicts in the south. Fortunately, the Sweet house stands today and its memories permit this reframing.

While the memory of the Ossian Sweet house bears rhetorical significance in its relation to present connections with Detroit's ongoing redevelopment and foreclosure crisis, the House's presence is also a challenge to dominant narrations of civil rights on three levels. Each of these traces of Ossian Sweet's legacy continue well after his passing in the presence of the house on Garland and eventually come to inform recent machinations of civil rights struggle.

First, the Sweet trial is one of the earliest rulings on the Castle Doctrine in favor of a black defendant, creating a precedent of self-defense in the American justice system that includes black citizens just as much as whites. Second, the legacy of the Sweet rulings reverberate over time in later trials that eventually lead to the Civil Rights Act of 1968, otherwise known as the Fair Housing Act. The landmark legislation more than forty years later crippled white supremacist frameworks in housing opportunities and we find many of its legal foundations in the Darrow's 1926 defense of Sweet. Third, Ossian Sweet's memory challenges and extends the dominant civil rights narrative to its longer, more complicated temporal origins prior to *Brown v Board* and spatial settings away from a uniquely southern problem. Thus, the rhetoric of Ossian Sweet's memory is not only useful as a materially present past for Detroit, but challenges our perspectives of civil rights as a whole.

Haunted Legacy: Specters of Sweet

Places of public memory vary in shape, size, form, and function, but each expands upon our dominant cultural narratives in public discourse. Monuments, for example, are rhetorically rich objects of memory because they suggest to audiences a version of the past worthy of being remembered by future generations. Historical markers are similar to monuments in that they signal spaces of significance, working to protect historical episodes from being forgotten. However, markers are different from more traditional monuments because they also indicate checkpoints of history, signaling that something of importance happened in their location rather than traditional monuments that commemorate through visual representation. Yet, the National Park Service highlights a unique feature in the Sweet House that extends our understanding of this particular place of public memory. The organization notes, "Today the

Ossian Sweet House continues to illustrate the role of 'ordinary' places in the extraordinary history of American race relations."³⁵ The notion of the mundane is an intriguing dynamic of the Sweet house's monumental role in American history and asks us to consider how ordinary spaces become sites of extraordinary memories. That is, while monuments are fashioned in the image of their subjects or as artistic tributes in their honor, the Sweet house is a mnemonic structure that earns rhetorical value despite its ordinary origins.

Throughout the civil rights struggle, ordinary spaces play an essential role as the settings of our significant historical moments. Spaces like a bus, restaurant, bungalow, or a stretch of road eventually become the scenes of substantial moments in the black freedom struggle. For us to consider the Sweet House as a unique space of memory, despite its unremarkable beginnings, we should recognize what differentiates our understanding of the everyday and how the designation complicates a discussion of public memory. An ordinary space is most readily assigned as those spaces in everyday life that involve regular interaction and have little more influence on daily experience other than serving as the backdrop for what we identify as 'normal.'³⁶ This does not mean that ordinary spaces are unimportant or insignificant, because as these spaces are disrupted, the regularity of the everyday is infringed. For example, Rosa Parks riding a bus for her daily trip to work is ordinary by nature, but her refusal to be mistreated in this space and subsequent arrest are what mark the specific bus as a site of significance. Therefore, the spaces that serve as a routine backdrop of our everyday lives are of historical and rhetorical significance as major events inscribe such spaces as a site worth remembering.

Through ordinary spaces of public memory, we build on our recognition of what constitutes as a site of public memory. Memory scholars describe public memory as an extension of collective memory where its presence rhetorically notes a site of particular significance for constituent communities.³⁷ This subject usually centers on the politicized genesis of a site, the location of its presence, or the depth of its story—typically fixing the critical gaze on a statue, museum, or monument. These forms of public memory are distinct from ordinary spaces of public memory because the monument itself is what marks the place (the location of the site) as noteworthy. In other words, the presence of the Civil Rights Memorial marks its space with a sense of importance, as visitors are invited to consider the mnemonic depth of the memorial toward the events that took place occurred external to the site itself. For ordinary spaces like the Sweet house, the extraordinary memories associated with the space are rooted in an ephemeral controversy or episode that took place there. Put another way, the spatial setting is what distinguishes commonplace sites of memory from spaces created specifically meant to commemorate. As such, it is the controversy itself and its consequences that magnify an ordinary space like the Ossian Sweet house into a site of public memory. Put another way; consider how a public memory analysis of a monument to Gettysburg likely would reveal rhetorical variations from a similar study on the hallowed ground where the Battle for Gettysburg took place. That said, neither strategy is inherently more effective than the other, but in each, the mnemonic and rhetorical qualities invite different readings of the event being commemorated.

I argue that the ordinary nature of the Sweet house is what allows the site to temporally endure as a rhetorical force more than a century after the episode even happened. By temporal

endurance, I mean the rhetorical features of the house itself and the salience of the event's memories that sustain its influence over time. In scholarship on the differences between narratives of vernacular memory versus authorized history, memory is noted for limitations in its force because it is often a peripheral discourse.³⁸ Public memories typically exist outside the authorities of traditional history, leaving their narrations to fade unless publics regularly attend to and remember them. As time passes, narratives of memory dissipate in public discourse, threatening the preservation of these complicated histories.³⁹ That said, the Sweet House is able to endure over time because of the ordinary elements of the site itself: an unremarkable bungalow.

The Sweet house succeeds as a site of public memory because the controversy attached to the site is a breach on a material space that most Americans can connect with: the home. The Sweet case captured America's attention partly because the issue at hand struck at the heart of the American Dream. Here was Ossian Sweet, working hard to make a name for himself as a physician, where after seeing success, was mobbed by white assailants. The case was controversial on several levels, but drew the attention of the NAACP and spectators alike because, if blacks were to be recognized as equal to their white counterparts, they should be able to live safely in their own homes. The civil rights struggle is marked by conflicts that surround the ordinary settings of everyday living. Spaces where individuals lived, worked, or ate food with their families each endure as places of memory because of their roles as basic settings of citizenship and of humanity.⁴⁰ As a home, the Sweet house functions as a universal space of citizenship and arguably human rights, and the attempts to strip him of these innate conditions projects the house as a noteworthy site of history.

Next, the Sweet house operates as a prominent site of public memory because of the performed or imagined experience that the site moves audiences to consider. As visitors to the site stand beyond its white fences and read the large commemorative markers in the front yard, it is easy to consider the experiences Ossian Sweet went through on September 9, 1925. Most individuals who encounter or read about the building can relate on some level to Ossian defending his home. In this way, the Ossian Sweet house and its attached legacy asks audiences to consider “what would you have done in similar circumstances?” As a simple dynamic of everyday life, homes may seem like otherwise negligible backdrops to our lives. Yet, in the moments when such fundamental parts of our everyday experience are violated or disrupted, the experience of these disturbances is perhaps the most relatable struggle to audiences. Consider as well the degree of struggle and commitment Sweet endured simply to find a house to call a home, only to have it violated. For audiences, being able to project oneself in the shoes of Ossian Sweet is a rhetorical force of the site and its legacy that make it an impactful material memory. Thus, it is the unremarkable foundations of the house and the simple frameworks of a home space that installs a rhetorical energy on the site and its legacy. Encountering the Sweet house moves audiences to imagine a version of his experience and reflect on the traumatic event. While housing developers, city officials, and Sweet himself never envisioned such a dark tale to be tied to the house on 2905 Garland, it exists rhetorically through mnemonic associations to an ordinary space in a broader city marred by housing discrimination.

Memories of Resistance

Just as ordinary qualities of the Sweet house build its rhetorical position as a place of public memory, these narrations endures over time because of their links to civic protest.

Resistance is sewn into the fabric of American identity as the spark that allowed the country to gain independence in the first place. Sites of resistance are valuable markers of memory because they appeal to fundamental notions of patriotism and a civic agency of improving human rights. In many ways, to be American is to appreciate the role of protest as the means of socio-cultural progress. Because of this association, sites of resistance often work as powerful markers of public memory. Across the country, memorials commemorate events like the Declaration of Independence, the Boston Tea Party, and civil rights protests. Moreover, films, books, and television shows focus on moments of resistance, preserving memories of these events into public consciousness. For American publics, tales of resistance are compelling and representations of their legacy speak to the civic qualities that transformed the nation and its community spaces. In addition to the Sweet house's place as a setting of protest, an attachment to a broader illustration of the civil rights struggle make it a compelling space of reflection as well.

The civil rights struggle in the United States is one fraught with controversy and pain inscribed in the American mythos. That struggle is yet to truly close and many issues Ossian Sweet confronted continue today. In the aftermath of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, recent historiographers challenge Americans to expand our perceived timelines of the civil rights struggle. Moreover, critical historians and civil rights scholars in general point to many of the contemporary civil rights struggles in the twenty-first century and connect them with shortcomings following the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s.⁴¹ As such, memories of rarely observed episodes like Ossian Sweet's that escape the dominant narrative provide nuance and depth to the longer black freedom struggle. Contemporary Detroit, for example, is one such

space scholars turn to as evidence toward the consequences of overlooking or dismissing a thorough analysis the larger civil rights struggle deserves. Bernadette Atuahene, a law professor and civil rights activist, for example, describes how Detroit's ongoing foreclosure crisis is the direct result of illegal tax valuations that were overlooked and neglected in the years after the Civil Rights Movement.⁴² Moreover, her investigation of the nearly one in four Detroit homes that was foreclosed upon in the last ten years reveals that many of the tax penalties assigned to these properties are tied to discriminatory taxing practices that were used against black buyers of the past like Ossian Sweet.⁴³ In a time of alleged resurrection, many Detroiters never saw this coming, but a more critical turn to the past reveals how some of these unjust mechanisms went unnoticed in the wake of celebratory civil rights victory in the late-1960s. Yet, with the Sweet House and its currently abandoned or blighted surroundings, the structure's memory rhetorically invites our return to these legacies and consideration as to how their presence hangs over Detroit.

The Sweet house is a fitting material site of public memory for this inquiry in that it confronts the history of the civil rights struggle and marks a few key challenges. First, the presence of the Sweet house is a material reminder that black resistance does not begin with the traditional telling of the civil rights struggle. Too often we see public association toward the fight for civil rights as a period tied directly to Dr. King. Yet, engaging the Sweet house is also to encounter first-hand a significant moment in this struggle located in the 1920s, well before King entered the national stage.⁴⁴ Additionally, the Sweet house is located in Michigan, a northern state in the perceived virtuous binary of civil rights resistance. The presence of a site of resistant memory in a northern state complicates the popular belief that the civil rights struggle

was a southern problem, an undercurrent that cleanses northern arenas of culpability or responsibility in the struggle for civil rights equality. The Sweet house as a public site asks audiences to consider how the north had a role in discriminatory practices, and how such histories evade the traditional telling of the Civil Rights Movement.

Finally, in our recognition of the Sweet house as a place of resistant civil rights memories, the site reshapes our recognition of Detroit's role in the history of black resistance in America. On Detroit's role in the history of the civil rights struggle, the city is often held as a place of virtue, where opportunity and tolerance attracted migrants to the Motor City. This vision is typical of the dominant civil rights narratives, where a cultural binary is perpetuated as the north is painted with broad strokes of progressivism and virtue. But critical interrogation of these stories tells a different version of history, and the Sweet house is a stark reminder that the north, and Detroit in particular, has a complicated connection with the civil rights struggle. Recent historical scholarship argues that Detroit represents a litany of social and political issues related to civil rights and the Sweet house is a material form of reflecting one of its most pervasive: housing.⁴⁵ For Detroit presently, the Sweet house functions as a relic of subversive attempts to systematically discriminate its black communities. Memories of housing injustice carry over time, and their socio-cultural ramifications are felt even today as the city was brought to its knees in 2013.

Remembering to Not Forget

The Ossian Sweet house is uniquely situated in a space that speaks to a larger conversation on not just housing segregation and resistance in the past, but a present force shaping Detroit as well. While some historical sites function as a snapshot of an event from

years ago, the Sweet house and the space surrounding it do so while simultaneously carrying characteristics of the city in the present. As a protected landmark that is well maintained and materially secure for generations to come, the house is paradoxically surrounded the aftermath of decay and blight that spread around it. Nearby houses are falling apart and some neighboring yards host years of wildflower and weed growth as they await demolition. Yet, situated at the center of these foul grounds is the Sweet House, a paradoxical figure of mnemonic sustainability as the structures around it fall to ruin. As such, the Sweet house occupies a dual role as a vessel of public memory where it simultaneously captures memories of Ossian Sweet's legacy while also bearing constitutive memories that display current struggles in Detroit's housing landscape.

In 1975, Michigan state officials declared the Sweet house a landmark, ensuring a permanent presence in Detroit space. Ten years later, the National Register of Historic Places added the site to its own registry, promoting the Sweet house to national landmark status.⁴⁶ While this step may seem like an empty ceremonious gesture to some, the declarations hold great symbolic and material consequences as well. On a symbolic level, the sequence of landmark declarations elevates the Sweet house beyond a mundane home space to its present role as a monument. Bestowing landmark importance on the house secures both the site and its complicated memory in Detroit for the foreseeable future. Moreover, the 1975 and 1985 declarations ensure that the material site is protected by temporal decays that threaten narratives of memory. Public memories are always at risk of weakening over time because of it is their public nature and regular recall that strengthens their salience.

Transforming from a location of disturbing history to an eventual landmark holds a variety of symbolic consequences related to the Sweet episode's memory in public discourse. As a site of public memory and monumental change, the Sweet house concretizes associations with resistance and legislative progress in Detroit's civil rights legacy. As a fixed reminder of northern settings of housing discrimination, the house's presence in Detroit complicates an otherwise sanitized narrative of regional virtue in the Civil Rights Movement. Given the official and state governance over the Sweet house though, it is reasonable to consider how this legacy is co-opted for political purposes.⁴⁷ However, the risk of co-option is mitigated by the very presence of the monument and the story it represents. Because of its permanence, the house rhetorically binds Detroit space to a history of rampant housing discrimination, safeguarding the memory of the Sweet ordeal regardless of the monument's oversight. Moreover, the house holds rhetorical value as it marks Detroit with a remnant of housing discrimination that later works as a reminiscent object when the city's housing market is embroiled in controversy once more.

The Sweet house's material presence also bears a constitutive function for the city in two key ways. Charland's work demonstrates that as we analyze the origins of community identity; foundational characteristics of such groups are rhetorically generated.⁴⁸ Urban constitutive rhetorics appeal to Amin and Thrift's work on city spaces and urban identities as well, where they argue the importance of salient objects as sources of cultural codes and symbolic referent's for communities.⁴⁹ Further, this constitutive feature illustrates how material memory shapes groups of people who engage them, in this case shaping the nature of a 'Detroiter.' But the Sweet house and its constitutive relationship to Detroit are unique because

it is the object's memory ascribing meaning upon the city rather than the object alone. Consider the permanency associated with the house now that it has become a monument and its legacy has been validated on a national scale. This permanency denotes that the narrative attached to the house is not only monumental to the shifts in American history, but is forever inscribed to the material makeup of Detroit. Not only was Detroit forever changed as a result of the Sweet ordeal in the 1920s, but vis-à-vis the Sweet house, the city grows around and in consequence to what the site means. And while the Sweet house exerts a constitutive force on the city through Ossian Sweet's singular struggle, it also projects a larger sentiment of resistance as well. These sentiment's are of particular significance as they inform the social memory of Detroiters, a dynamic social process Hannah Arendt describes as a learned framework that constructs our senses of self, home, and community⁵⁰ Thus, by way of the Sweet house (and similar sites in the city), Detroit becomes a city of resistance, a space where its residents are coded with a logic of courageous defiance.

In addition to the house's bearing on Detroit in the decades following the Sweet trials, we should consider how these same dynamics function in light of their role in the neighborhood and state of the city today and the years to follow. Walking by the house today, it is difficult to draw any relationship between the house and a larger improvement in housing equality for Detroit as a whole. For instance, with the Sweet house's presence in one of the neighborhoods struck hardest by the city's 2013 bankruptcy, what purpose does the object's memory now hold in relation to present-day decay? A block over on St. Clair Street, entire stretches of homes stand unoccupied, some with roofs caving in. Sure, some families and their homes have endured the storm of the bankruptcy, but for the most part, the neighborhood is in shambles.

And for some Detroiters who lost their homes in the wake of the city's steep fall, the behind their losses are disturbingly similar to the experiences of a man who occupied 2905 Garland in 1925. Thus, as more stories emerge of unjust foreclosure or mistaken demolition, the Sweet house's memory returns for a different purpose, reminding the city of its wounds that have yet to be healed. For Detroiters like the Baxter family who now occupy the Sweet house, the building's legacy reminds us the Detroit of today is not so different than the Detroit of almost a century ago.

Daniel Baxter grew up in the Sweet house after his father purchased the property in 1958, as Ossian Sweet faced insurmountable property taxes. Phyllis Vine interviewed Baxter for a 2004 project on the Sweet trials, where he reflected on his neighborhood's struggle to survive in one of the city's most impoverished areas. Despite the community dwindling around him, Baxter says, "The house is mine and the legacy is mine to make sure that the United States would know who Dr. Sweet was in the fiber of America." Folks like Baxter and sites like the Sweet house ensure that no matter how much the city of Detroit moves forward or rebuilds on the ruins of the past, the legacy of that event remain in the present and shape the future. Vine writes that the importance of the Sweet house changes the material fabric of Detroit, challenging how we consider the civil rights struggle. She writes:

Long before there was a Rosa parks, a Fannie Lou Hamer, an Andrew Young, Thurgood Marshall, or a Martin Luther King Jr., there was a doctor named Ossian Sweet. This community has dedicated itself to keeping his name and his legacy alive by joining Baxter in this celebration...Henceforth they will inform all who savor justice and freedom that this is where Ossian Sweet stood his ground to claim part of the American Dream. They will become a legacy for a community that, hard hit, wants to cherish its heroes. They will challenge all who stand at the corner to "remember not to forget."⁵¹

And so it stands that the Sweet house charges the city to remember the impact of the Sweet ordeal not only from the context of the 1920s and an origin of civil rights housing legislation, but contemporary problems as well. The deterioration of the neighborhood around the Sweet house shows that in more than nine decades since the trial, housing injustice continues to obstruct black American families. For Detroit, a city on the rebound after decades of decline, the material reality of the Sweet house and the public memories sustained in the site illustrate this city is beholden to yesterday's ghosts of housing segregation as it marches forward. For many years, the Sweet house stood as a memory site that represented an episode from long ago as the city around it fell from grace. But now, with narratives of Detroit's rebound sweeping the nation, a familiar problem of housing injustice is once again placing a negative spotlight on the city. As many decades-long black residents look on as their homes are taken, demolished, or auctioned off to incoming communities, the Sweet house assumes a different purpose. In the context of a rapidly transforming Detroit, the house's memory returns to focus, haunting the city with a legacy that was central to its collapse and will be key to its revival.

Mnemonic Revenant

In July 2016, Detroit celebrated the demolition of the 10,000th home in the city, a milestone for the blight removal program launched in 2014.⁵² Chaired by Detroit native and billionaire Quicken Loans CEO Dan Gilbert, the Detroit Blight Task Force's mission is to eradicate blight and secure properties struck hardest by Detroit's economic. The task force's vision is to collect as many properties as possible to either repurpose the land or auction off the properties so Detroit can rebuild itself from the ground up. Detroit's mayor, Mike Duggan said:

Hitting 10,000 houses was a remarkable accomplishment, but we've still got 30,000 to go. Every time one of these houses goes down, we raise the quality of life for everybody

else in the neighborhood, and you look here, the beautiful house of the families across the street. These are folks who stayed in the city, paid their taxes, kept their houses up and had to watch the blight spread.⁵³

If we take a moment to carefully consider these demolitions and Mayor Duggan's statements, we see how the same housing problems that drove the Sweet trials haunt Detroit. It is certainly true that as the blight task force began started, many of the houses referenced in the mass blight in the city were abandoned. But one suggestion in Duggan's praise is more complicated as it relates to a larger housing issue and the memory of this struggle in Detroit: taxes. Following the city's bankruptcy declaration and in the wake of the blight task force, many of the 40,000 homes that are scheduled to be demolished were foreclosed upon because of back-taxes owed to the city. However, two particular concerns emerge as we consider how the city determines the nature of these foreclosures: the origins of these taxes along with the city's promise to rebuild the city for the betterment of the people of Detroit.

For one longtime Detroiter, Mr. Jones (he chooses not to give his first name), the prospects for renewal following the bankruptcy meant the dreams for his hometown were finally coming true. Sadly, they have unfolded as a nightmare. Mr. Jones had lived in Detroit since 1954, and despite the trauma of seeing tanks rolling through the streets in 1967 and suffering various episodes of police violence during the uprising, he vowed to never leave the city: Detroit was home.⁵⁴ But property tax foreclosures after Detroit's bankruptcy have begun doing what the violence of the uprising and institutional racism of the city's past never could: displacing Jones and hundreds of black families like his. In a *New York Times* piece detailing Mr. Jones' plight, Atuahene finds that foreclosure's like that of Jones' are "a result of illegal property tax assessments and inflated property tax bills that many Detroiters cannot pay." The

problem is they shouldn't have to pay them to begin with, since many of these initial assessments date back to a time in Detroit's troubled history of overvaluing properties to prospective black buyers. While the city publicly acknowledged the injustice of these assessments following the Sweet case, *Shelley v Kramaer*, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, they never got around to re-evaluating these determinations. Even worse, in the heart of Detroit's collapse between 2009-2015, a study with Atuahene and Hodge revealed that 85 percent of Detroit homes were assessed at a value more than 50 percent more than their market value. Per Michigan's state constitution, home assessments cannot be valued at anything higher than 50 percent of their market value, a law Detroit was in clear violation of. During this six-year period when the city wrestled with its plummet to financial ruin from 2009-2015, officials evaluated homes at double their value in some cases, stacking the deck against the mostly black population in preparation for a wave of foreclosures.⁵⁵ Overall, Atuahene's studies found that more than 85 percent of all homes that have been foreclosed from 2011-2015 have been as a direct result of illegal tax codes, discriminatory valuations from the past, or negligent city procedures.⁵⁶ So in the years where Gilbert and his Blight Removal Task Force have been foreclosing and bulldozing properties, their actions are premised on some of the same injustices that propelled the Ossian Sweet trials, all in the image of "renewal."

Another disturbing dynamic of the mass foreclosures and residential displacement surrounds the city is the deflected responsibility from Detroit officials. Mayor Duggan suggested that most of these homeowners had the opportunity to apply for relief with the assessments, but simply chose not to. However, local reporters note that while these mechanisms were put in place in response to public outcry, no notices were sent to applicable residents.⁵⁷ Further,

the bureaucratic and expensive processes of applying, hiring a lawyer, and following through on these procedures left most applicable citizens in the dark, facing an inevitability that they would lose their homes. Ultimately, Detroit foreclosed on thousands of properties in what was the largest property tax foreclosure in American history since the Great Depression. Mr. Jones ended up losing his home based on unpaid taxes valued at \$49,000, but watched as a week later, his property was sold for \$2,900. “We are in the first period of growth in 50 or 60 years. People are moving back,” Mayor Duggan claimed.⁵⁸ But this growth comes with a caveat: the displacement and unjust foreclosure of loyal Detroit residents like Jones. For working class communities who watched the mass exodus of wealthy white businessmen and middle-class black Detroiters decades ago, it’s become obvious that Detroit housing continues to wound the city. The cost of finally attracting people to move into the city seems to have come at the sacrifice of the very people who kept Detroit afloat during its darkest times.

In the neighborhood where the Sweet house stands, neighboring buildings have been demolished as part of the city’s blight removal. A few have completed demolition and several others are on the schedule to be torn down in the next four years. While the city runs what it boasts as the “largest and most transparent demolition plan in the country,” it fails to mention that if occupants refuse to fix their homes within six months of being notified of the building’s identification as a blighted structure, occupants are evicted and the property is seized. Thousands of houses, both abandoned and occupied, will fall in the next eight years, but one will stand as a painful memory of the struggle many Detroit families face today.

A Haunting Memory

Much of the national narrative surrounding Detroit since the 2013 bankruptcy has been one of progress. The mayor describes how people are coming back, local billionaires report that business is starting to flourish again, and even the city's basketball team, the Detroit Pistons, has returned home. But as we heap optimism on the city's revival, situations like housing and the blight removal program ask just who is benefitting from this revival? Ironically enough, at a point where Detroit seems to be on an upswing, it is Detroiters who seem to be benefitting the least from these changes and in many ways suffering as a result of them. As many families lose their homes and others live in perhaps the only house on a street ignored by the influx of recent economic activity, the Sweet house returns the city to its legacy of shortcomings. While the monument marker details the Sweet case's importance to legislative progress in America's civil rights struggle, for Detroit the legacy of this triumph has been hollow. After the Sweet trials, the tendrils of white supremacy in housing markets evolved, working around the 1926 ruling. The city began redlining, stepped up restrictive covenant prosecutions, and in 1941, built a concrete wall to physically keep black citizens from integrating a white neighborhood.⁵⁹ Along with these strategies, Ossian Sweet's own struggles post-trial bear a striking resemblance to those of Mr. Jones today. Following the trial and loss of his family, Ossian struggled to maintain payment for the house. Despite a well paying job, Ossian was unable to pay off the contract on his home until 1950, a debt that was illegal to begin with. In the years following, property taxes brought Ossian to financial ruin and he lost the home. Sixty years later, an echo of these illegal property tax practices that stymied Ossian's pursuit of the American dream continue to bury today's Detroiters in a time where the city is toting notions of recovery. In turn, the Sweet

house cultivates a haunting presence in the city, illustrating to the present that the wrongs committed against modern Detroiters by way of taxation are not some unfortunate oversight. In the context of the cities blight removal, the Sweet house becomes a rhetorical revenant, haunting the city with its legacy and rupturing the city's attempt to assert a reimagined identity.

The Sweet house's ability to haunt Detroit stems from its expression of the Derridian notion of hauntological revenants, or, artifacts that return us to a particular moment or frame of thinking. Derrida introduces his thesis on hauntology to explain the fundamentals of cultural inheritance that carry from history's past and inform our present. He adds that the spirit of the past serves an ontological function in our constructs of self and community, that we are always already in the presence of a present that is marked by a past that is neither dead nor alive, but a specter.⁶⁰ For Detroit, one of the city's inherited spirits is the courage of Ossian Sweet in response to housing discrimination that now inhabits the house. Moreover, Derridian hauntology appeals to the possibilities that the present conjures and awakens these spectral ghosts of the past. "The revenant, ghosts or spirits that come back, destabilize any settled idea of the present," and therefore loom over communities that inherit such pasts.⁶¹ Hauntological revenants are useful in Detroit's case because they allow critics to determine how issues in the present echo similarities of the past that were ineffectually resolved or perhaps even neglected. I argue that the Sweet house works as a rhetorical revenant, as its memory returns to focus in a present where housing injustice seems to have once more emerged. As such, this memory's return exerts a disruptive force on the revival narrative for the city, both in its material position in Detroit space and symbolic representation of unending housing discrimination.

With the Ossian Sweet house, the presence of the past in memory's revenant produces three rhetorical complications to the city's redevelopment that as a whole, situate Detroit as a palimpsest bound to its legacy of housing injustice. First, this specter of memory in the Sweet house rhetorically invites us to rethink our understanding of Detroit's revival, and the factors behind these changes. While the few years following the 2013 bankruptcy have yielded progress to the 7.2 square mile section of Midtown and Downtown, some challenge that the bankruptcy was only the beginning of their downfall in Detroit. "The whole mess makes me feel like I was stuck up and robbed" Jones stated in his series of unfortunate turns since the declaration.⁶² While the city opened its renovations with concerted efforts in its business sector, surrounding neighborhoods express frustration that the city seems to be focused on attracting outsiders rather than help Detroit's own. Several reports on Detroit's revitalization are critical of the city's treatment of its own citizens, noting an apparently concerted appeal to young, white newcomers while ignoring their 83 percent black population. Complicating matters further, demolitions in attempts to restart entire neighborhoods echoes the hauntings of mistreated black residents for the benefit of white constituents. While the dust is yet to settle on the rebuilding efforts in Detroit, stories of gentrification, foreclosure, and displacement reflect similar sentiments of white aggression from before. The Sweet house challenges the city not to forget the mistakes of the past, etching both a symbolic and material memory of housing discrimination in a city attempting to recreate itself. Because of the Sweet house, the legacies of housing segregation will forever mark the city of its racially charged infractions. As the Detroit Blight task Force continues bulldozing houses on Garland and Charlevoix, they will eventually confront the Sweet house and face a choice. On the one hand,

the city can ignore the lessons of history, where rampant housing discrimination played a role in numerous eruptions of violence, crippling the city. On the other hand, Detroit can become the Model City it once prided itself as, moving forward from the chains of historical racism and presenting real efforts to improve the lives of black citizens. Detroit cannot, however, outrun its past, as it is bound to a memory of racial injustice through the Sweet house.

Next, consider how the physical presence of the Sweet house and its present surroundings hold a dual rhetoric of looking to the future while simultaneously being stuck in the past. As a site successfully petitioned to become a monument by the Baxter family, the Sweet house looks to forever shape the city as a mark of Detroit's discriminatory past and Detroit agency. In the years since the infamous 2013 bankruptcy, the city has taken drastic measures to erase what they saw as a blight rotting the city from within. And while most of these houses were vacant, some families who owned properties were evicted or had eminent domain declared on their homes. In a rapid sweep to cleanse the city of structures it feels have no place in the city's future, Detroit has foreclosed on more than 100,000 buildings over the last ten years.⁶³ Yet, no matter what visions the city sees for the void in the Garland neighborhood, one structure that cannot be destroyed and will forever remind the city of its presence is a quaint bungalow, an otherwise ordinary domestic space that earns monumental meaning. The material memory of the Sweet monument prevents Detroit from turning the page on its past housing injustices, especially as they relate to recent controversies. As the house remains despite concerted efforts to eradicate its surroundings, I suggest that Detroit becomes a palimpsest that is marked by the haunted memory of the Sweet house. As "structures characterized by superimposed features produced at two or more distinct periods,"

the concept of the palimpsest helps us determine moments where a material presence of the past exists.⁶⁴ As a site that rhetorically moves an artifact from a private to public space and mundane to monumental meanings, the Sweet house becomes a pillar of the Detroit palimpsest.

Finally, as a revenant of discriminatory memory returns Detroit to a position linking controversies of the present with errors of the past, the Sweet house exerts a constitutive force on the city. This haunting appeals to the third rhetorical complication that the Sweet house's memory bears on the city's identity, in that it disrupts those attempts to revise or challenge how we see Detroit. While recent instances of controversial evictions and foreclosed homes are problematic in their own right, the return of Ossian Sweet's legacy through the house's persistence compounds a disturbing reading on Detroit's residential mistreatment. The Sweet house reminds Detroiters that injustices associated with the present redevelopment are not occurring in a vacuum, but are the latest in a storied history of discrimination. Instead, the house haunts the city through as it returns Ossian Sweet's legacy to focus in relation to the Detroiters post-bankruptcy who are likewise having their dreams of a Detroit home stripped from them. As such, the constitutive force at hand with the Sweet house is one that embeds the shadow of housing discrimination on the city, preserving a narrative as Detroit marches forward and is thereby forced to confront as redevelopment spreads. Immovably situated at the center of this demolition and reconstruction project, the house interrupts any attempt to cleanse the space entirely as it grasps onto a sentiment and identity of Detroit's past that cannot be shaken loose.

The Revenant's Rupture

In a city where a recent influx of people from all over are reimagining, rethinking, and envisioning new visions of what defines Detroit, the Sweet House stands at the ready to remind them just what Detroit is and who Detroiters are. In the wake of the foreclosure wave that in many ways unrightfully foreclosed one in four family homes in recent years, the memory of Ossian Sweet is conjured to remind everyone watching that the modern Detroit is committing many of the same discriminatory sins that fractured its foundations from a century earlier.⁶⁵ In this way, the Sweet House challenges and disrupts the efforts to redefine Detroit's identity, writing on the core of the city's heart a message of resistance and residential resilience. Like Ossian Sweet, Detroiters are fighters, and have shown that whatever it takes to save their Motor City, they are willing to fight for these spaces. That fight seems to be underway, as the present foreclosure crisis that echoes the struggle of Ossian Sweet is rendering many Detroiters homeless. But Detroiters are fighting back and in some cases, winning, forcing the city to rehouse and compensate its residents for their own wrongdoings, much like they did with Ossian Sweet.⁶⁶ In this way, the Sweet house works as a symbol for Detroiters that the discriminatory and illegal roots that work to displace residents are neither impenetrable nor unstoppable. Rather, the Sweet house reminds the city that its own legacy is one where the fight to defend one's home is a part of what distinguishes Detroit's defiant, resolute character. Therefore, across this chapter, I have argued that the Sweet house's public memory is a constitutive rhetoric that links the city with a resistant framework that flows through the character of Detroit's residents. As the Sweet House's commemorative presence transforms the

once ordinary private space to a remarkable public site of resistant legacy, it invites others to encounter the resolute attitude that defined Detroit's past and will shape its future as well.

With Ossian Sweet's legacy unshakably bound to the city space, Detroit becomes host to a mnemonic narrative that cannot disappear and will therefore be influential in the city's future. This, I argue, is one of the instances where Detroit's pillars of public memory mark the city as an urban palimpsest. The palimpsest originates from early exercises in human writing, where writing bases were wiped clean of older markings to be reused in the future.⁶⁷ But when writers cleaned these canvases, shadows of these earlier markings remain and the writing base then became a palimpsest, an object where erasure leaves a residual presence that is incapable of effacement and always exists as present and future works are applied. Massey and Huysen explore the palimpsest metaphor in our living spaces, noting how exercises like the rebuilding of Hiroshima or the restructuring of Berlin mark instances of an urban space as palimpsest. I argue that Detroit is unique from these war-torn samples and is an interesting display of a city attempting to transform itself after an economic ruin. The Sweet house is one such site where, through its permanence as a monument and its legacy in Detroit's civil rights struggle, marks the space of the Motor City. That marking becomes a source of disruption and contestation to the city, as ongoing works to create a 'New Detroit' are stifled by the presence of a past that always bears a memory from before that cannot be removed. While a singular memory of Ossian Sweet's courageous resistance may seem futile in the network of investment and entrepreneurial efforts to take control of Detroit's future, this legacy is one of many that define the Detroit palimpsest. In other words, Detroit's redevelopment faces an improbable and arguably impossible task of redefining the city's identity because the space on which these

changes are applied is not cleansed or empty, but marked and imprinted upon with memories that generate a residential spirit of defiance, toughness, and tenacity.

So how do we understand the means by which memories and sites like the Ossian Sweet house hold influence on a palimpsest such as Detroit? Derrida points us to an understanding of these diachronic impacts through the application of hauntology. He writes of the ways in which the ontological configurations of a space, person, or group are haunted by a specter of the past. Similarly, Casey's discussion on memory's generative force illustrates how our present and futures are always already informed by the past.⁶⁸ Mnemonic narratives like those of Ossian Sweet are especially effective because they shape the experience we come to understand as the present-day, but also stand as resources for guiding the future as well. A city like Detroit is a unique application of hauntology because a specter of discrimination haunting the present is one that returns residents to a history that they can then see in the experience of Ossian Sweet a tribulation that reflects their own. In all, a sobering memory extends from the Sweet house that ascribes a level of symbolic identification between black Detroiters with Ossian Sweet himself. As people encounter the site of Ossian Sweet's stand against white tyranny, the confluence of today's controversial revival efforts and Sweet's own experiences after the trial flattens the temporal difference between black Detroiters and Ossian. In other words, we see a haunted specter of Ossian and given that black Detroiters understand his struggles on many levels, it's apparent that they are just like him. And sadly, not much has changed. While Ossian's memory haunts the preserved home on Garland street with a symbolic connection to today's black Detroiters, it begs the question as to when will justices for housing and for civil rights finally be served? In Dan Gilbert's address to wipe out the blight weighing down the city,

he argued that Detroit would return to prominence, as a proud city filled with people made up of “grit and resilience.” Yet, it is those campaigns launched by Gilbert and city officials that threatens to extinguish this resilience, making us wonder just who is are the new Detroiters that these groups envision taking part in the city’s redevelopment. However, while the circumstances of Detroit’s future are disturbing and do threaten the cultural foundations on some level, they are confronted by sites like the Sweet house that disrupt their success while stoking the resistant character in Detroiters.

Ossian Sweet’s house on 2905 Garland Street presented a challenge in 1925 and today invites us to reconsider various factors in the rapid revival of Detroit. In all, the Sweet house is a site of haunting memory, a space where the rhetorical reflections of its history are polysemic in nature and complicated in their contemporary application. Further, the house itself is a prominent fixture in a city marked by esteemed sites and infamous histories. And though I argue the house’s memory haunts the city, thereby reshaping the ontological dynamic of the motor city, such a designation is not an inherently negative diagnosis for an urban space wrestling with its past. Detroit’s revival may be advancing at a quick pace, but to place a sweeping evaluation in its considerations of memories that influence it would be premature. The years since the bankruptcy have brought plenty of incredible changes to meet the sad realities of mostly black residents once again being wronged by the city they fought to save for decades. Lucky for Detroit, these same groups of Detroiters have proven to be resilient in their fight to be equally embraced by their city as it seems to with their white counterparts. As to whether the city will take heed of the memories of housing discrimination that weave through the fabric of Detroit and thoughtfully engage the needs of its black residents: only time will tell.

Notes

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⁵⁹ Lindsey Smith, Kaye Lafond and Lara Moehlman, "Data analysis: 'Modern day Redlining' happening in Detroit and Lansing," (*Michigan Radio*; February 15, 2018).

⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.63

⁶¹ Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings, "Remnants and Revenants: Politics and Violence in the work of Agamben and Derrida," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 13 (2010), 127-144.

⁶² Bernadette Atuahene, "Don't let Detroit's revival rest"

⁶³ John Gallagher, "Foreclosure crisis makes Detroit a city of renters, not homeowners," *Detroit Free Press*, (March 20, 2017). Web.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Kroessler, "The city as palimpsest," *CUNY Academic Works* (January 2, 2015), Web.

⁶⁵ Bernadette Atuahene, "Compensate Detroiters who illegally lost their homes," *The Detroit News* (June 13, 2018).Web.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Katharyne Mitchell, "Monuments, memorials, and the politics of memory," *Journal of Urban Geography*, 24(3), 2003. P.442-459.

⁶⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.19; Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013).

Chapter 3 EMERGENT MEMORY: THE 8-MILE WALL

In May 2006, Detroit artist Chazz Miller stood among hundreds of fellow Detroiters to unveil a mural that would transform the surrounding 8 Mile and Wyoming neighborhood.¹ While the mural details images of Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth, and Martin Luther King Jr., it is the canvas on which they rest that stirred the neighborhood. The base for these murals is a wall, six feet in height, one foot in depth, and a half-mile in length that has stood at the intersection of 8 Mile Road and Wyoming Avenue since 1941. For the adjacent residents, the wall is an unavoidable object in their lives, as it cuts through yards and playgrounds, preventing two neighborhoods from engaging one other. Built as a barrier between black and white neighborhoods during the height of housing segregation, the wall has functioned as a material scar for residents on both sides of the wall, an echo of a segregated past that still grips the city of Detroit today.² However, residents like Miller teamed up with a local non-profit, the Motor City Blight Busters (MCBB), to transform the wall from a site where its mnemonic associations may transcend from a legacy of injustice to one of triumph.³ Since the unveiling, hundreds of residents have voluntarily added to the mural, a compelling project that begs the question as to how urban communities can reappropriate relics of systemic injustice.

In the years since the mural project started, Detroit fell to bankruptcy in 2013 but is rebuilding rapidly, propelling the city to an optimistic future. In light of this optimism, Detroit resident Teresa Moon tells us that the wall is more important than ever, that “the wall tells the story of Detroit that must not be forgotten.”⁴ While some suggest the wall traps the city in a sentiment of anxiety, another resident argues “getting angry over it isn’t going to solve anything...but what’s important to me is our kids [understand] that blacks lived on one side and

whites on the other.”⁵ In this way, the 8 Mile wall holds a dual role as a material force of public memory rhetoric. On the one hand, the wall is a remnant of a time when historian Jeff Horner says, “it was perfectly legal to discriminate against people of color. Until I was 7 years old, you didn’t have to sell them your house if you didn’t like the color of their skin.”⁶ On the other hand, the wall is a mnemonic reflection of hope, where murals visually capture Detroit’s unwavering march forward. In a time of swift Detroit resurgence, the 8 Mile wall is a significant cultural marker in a resolute urban community demanding not to be forgotten.

The 8 Mile wall, I argue, is a key public representation of Detroit’s legacy of segregation. However, as a structure built without commemorative purposes, this chapter explores how these memories rhetorically emerge. While commemorative texts like museums and memorials are of regular focus in scholarly inquiry of public memory, the wall is a unique object because its mnemonic narrations generate naturally, free from institutional or official regulation like that of a museum or statue. I describe this generative process as emergent memory, an extension of memory studies where extraordinary circumstances transform spaces or sites into vessels of memory. As the wall’s public memory endures over time, the mural project resituates the site’s rhetorical function as the surrounding community exercises agency to shift the wall’s meaning. From its discriminatory legacy, I suggest that the wall’s emergent memory defines the surrounding urban space, working as a constitutive force on a Detroit community exposed to its material and symbolic influences.⁷ As Detroiters reclaim this space through the community mural project, this emergent memory is retained, but repositioned in a way that ensures the troubled memories of the city’s past are not forgotten. The genesis of these public memories and their realignment through the mural project signify the wall’s capacity to rhetorically

harken back to an era of struggle while simultaneously representing civil rights progress in Detroit.

I contend that scholarly recognition of sites like the wall as a reflective space permits critics to explicate where and how public memories rhetorically generate during times of controversy. Moreover, the wall's dual functions as a divisive space from the past and a modern site of public agency appeal to residential efforts to seize control of the city's redevelopment. I take seriously the addition of the murals now situated on the wall, arguing that their presence preserves the site's emergent memories while repositioning the wall's sentiment through civil rights iconography. Reading this site as a space over time allows us to recover these emergent memories to understand how the murals shift or redirect their implications. The 8 Mile wall, its history, and the murals extending its meaning speak to an ongoing dialogue toward navigating the presence of material scars in public space, and their role in defining community affiliations in historically segregated cities.⁸

Surveying public memory of Detroit's civil rights struggle adds to current literature toward northern civil rights memories and their rhetorical underpinnings.⁹ Moreover, I read the 8 Mile wall as an urban border, borrowing from Robert DeChaine's work on cultural implications of border rhetoric in community creation.¹⁰ Scholars of spatial rhetorics note the cultural implications of borders, but I narrow this inquiry to an urban context to reveal how Detroit identity is patently shaped and embedded in residents living among this segregation icon. I argue Detroit's border connotations as products of public memory, specifically in relation to the city's legacy of civil rights injustice. I connect rhetorics of public memory and urban spatiality in light of similar scholarship on the profound role of civil rights memories in shaping

our perspectives toward civil rights history and their implications.¹¹ While much of the field examines public memory through focused efforts to remember subjects through deliberately commemorative sites, this study builds on the origins of memory and places in which memory exists. Specifically, this article illustrates how an unlikely space like a division barrier can become mnemonic, and then investigates an episode of public intervention that sustains but redirects community connotations with this legacy.

To describe how such memories cultivate, I offer the notion of emergent memory, which I define as associations rhetorically produced from noteworthy experiences that exert a constitutive force on their contiguous communities. Donofrio applies similar principles in her study on the place-making frameworks of the 9/11 memorials in relation to traumatic origins of memory rhetorics.¹² I extend from her work on memory born from a synchronic episode of trauma to include more diachronic controversies that produce memory, and consider how memory appears outside the regulation of commissioning forces. Next, Dickinson and Aiello illustrate the experiential force of memory rhetorics as individuals “go through” reverential spaces.¹³ As such, my study is informed through my own encounters with this site along with local news coverage, including residential perspectives on the wall’s influences of their understandings of home and selfhood.¹⁴ I locate this study in line with similar projects on material memory, specifically through contemplating public memories defined outside the governance of political or commissioning bodies.¹⁵ Similarly, McAttackney describes how rhetorical associations to a wall or mural art “maintains and reinforces identity,” a feature I contend is present in the 8 Mile wall’s residential engagement.¹⁶ Although scholars note the power of civic agency in changing spaces of memory and memory’s variability, these projects

highlight transformative acts typically performed by temporary visitors and supplemental adornments.¹⁷ This case, however, concerns a fixed community of black residents defined by the wall that not only transforms the barrier, but by extension, their home and themselves as well.

I begin this chapter first by situating the wall in its historical context within Detroit's legacy of housing segregation. I detail the complicated history leading to the wall's creation and the site's association with 8 Mile Road, situating the wall as a marker of Detroit identity. Moving from these contextual factors, I will describe the mural project, noting the wall's significance as Detroit continues to rebuild itself. I then theorize emergent memory, a feature of public memory studies toward the origin of such memories and the tenets that mark a site worthy of remembering. The third section analyzes the emergent public memory from the wall, fixed on the recollection to the city's segregated past and the present function as a vision for civil rights possibilities. The 8 Mile wall, I defend, shapes the spatial rhetoric of Detroit, simultaneously allowing visitors to both gaze at the city's past while also viewing possibilities for a better future through sustained presence of vernacular emergent memory.

Dividing Detroit

In August 1941, Detroit hit a peak in black migration and job growth with the expansion of industrial labor. These rapid changes brought pressure from white families looking to relocate from downtown Detroit to the northwest suburbs of the city. As a result, city officials sought assistance from housing developers to build an all-white subdivision west of its Wyoming neighborhood. Before applying for funding through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), the lead developer asked the Home Owners' Loan Corporation to

appraise the value of the land in the 8 Mile-Wyoming area in the city's north side. To his dismay, surveyors graded the land a "D," or, "hazardous" because of its close proximity to supposed 'slum' housing occupied by working class black families.¹⁸ Not to be deterred, the developer worked out a compromise in exchange for the mortgage loans needed from the FHA: a wall. Proposing the imposing concrete wall that would span a half-mile between black homes and the prospective white development, the developer secured the mortgage loans and approval from Detroit officials. Today, the wall no longer holds legislative powers following the 1948 *Shelley v Kraemer* decision, but its presence in a predominately black space arrests the city in the discriminatory past from which it came.

As a material remain of unjust housing practices, the 8 Mile wall complicates traditional connections between Detroit and the larger Civil Rights Movement. Sugrue describes how, "too often, history simplifies Detroit's involvement in the movement as nothing more than a riot."¹⁹ While the scope of this project cannot cover the totality of Detroit's role in the overarching movement, tensions associated with the wall reflect a long struggle of systemic racist housing legislation for the city. Similarly, Martelle adds that most of Detroit's current predicaments are rooted in historical housing injustice, dating as far back as the late 1800s, which builds on the extended importance of this site's legacy.²⁰ To understand how housing informs residential sentiments in Detroit and the 8 Mile wall, I turn to early 1900s restrictive covenants and the fallout of the 1925 Ossian Sweet incident.

Oddly enough, the origin of restrictive housing covenants comes from the 1917 *Buchanan v Warley* ruling, which banned racial zoning in state developments, but not private deals.²¹ Afterward, the use of restrictive covenants began, where housing contracts or property

deeds typically included clauses restricting property sale to non-white buyers. A common restrictive covenant in housing agreements read as follows:

Hereafter no part of said property or any portion thereof shall be...occupied by any person not of the Caucasian race, it being intended hereby to restrict the use of said property...against occupancy as owners or tenants of any portion of said property for resident or other purposes by people of the Negro or Mongolian race.²²

In Detroit, restrictive covenants started appearing in housing contracts during the 1920s with the influx of black and migrant workers flocking to new manufacturing job opportunities. As non-whites began filling the city, white families and their realtors feared for the value of their homes and potential crime because of the close proximity to these newcomers. Restrictive covenants operated as segregated maintenance during this time, as realtors worked to prevent black communities from “infiltrating” white neighborhoods.²³ These restrictions were fairly successful, with less than three percent of all homes built during pre-WWII period being sold to black buyers, a trend that continued well into the mid-twentieth century.²⁴ While restrictive covenants prevented most black families from moving into white neighborhoods, the Ossian Sweet lawsuit compelled developers to reinforce their preventative efforts against black home ownership.

Ossian Sweet was a black physician who, in 1925, moved with his family into a white neighborhood on Garland Avenue. After paying over thirty percent above market value for a bungalow, the Sweet family moved into their new home September 8, 1925.²⁵ The move stoked hostility in the neighborhood, and the next day a mob of white men invaded Sweet’s home, where the resulting conflict left one man from the mob injured and another, Leon Bringer, dead from a gunshot wound. Sweet and his companions were arrested for the incident, but ultimately acquitted of murder charges. While Sweet’s overall story is tragic, the 1925 cases

revealed a legislative weakness in covenants perpetuating housing segregation in Detroit. The ruling declared black families had the right to defend properties they purchased, even during periods of ownership dispute.²⁶ For white developers, the Sweet rulings were a blow, signaling that racial steering needed strength beyond covenants. To meet this challenge, they began devising more substantial means of restriction, leading to the 1941 creation of the 8 Mile wall.

Built fifteen years after the Sweet ruling, the wall symbolized the extreme measures whites would turn to in order to uphold segregated living. Black Detroiters fought tirelessly against restrictive covenants, and the 1926 ruling was a much-needed victory against unjust housing practices. And while these practices were eventually ruled unlawful, the 8 Mile wall was the evolution in segregation practice against black Detroiters. As such, public memory associated with the wall cannot be limited to the synchronic episode in which it was built. Instead, memory extends across the diachronic period of meticulous efforts to maintain strategies displacing black families so whites could live “safe distances from undesirable[s].”²⁷ Therefore, these mnemonic investments build over time since the wall’s material nature ensures that its associations extend beyond 1941 to the enduring chapters of racism and other Detroit controversies in proximity to the wall’s location.

8 Mile Road: Urban Border

Just as the wall haunts the city from its controversial origins, it also builds associations with the infamous 8 Mile Road, perhaps the most popular association with contemporary Detroit. In a city celebrated for roots in Motown, jazz, and automobiles, Detroit’s rugged image of late is more frequently tied to 8 Mile Road.²⁸ Those unfamiliar with Detroit oftentimes associate the subtexts of 8 Mile with Detroit native Eminem, the chart-topping rapper who

helped produce his semi-autobiographical film in 2002, *8 Mile*. The film's box-office success placed Detroit and its enigmatic 8 Mile boundary in the national spotlight.²⁹ Throughout the film, 8 Mile becomes the racially contested borderland of acceptance and rejection in the underground hip-hop scene that is central to the movie's plot. As such, various instances of crime, violence, and other illicit activities featured throughout the film are popularly associated with 8 Mile Road long after. These associations were not nationally recognized threats with Detroit, but the film's release at the time of Detroit's steepest financial decline reinforced misguided perceptions that 8 Mile functioned as an urban Wild West. Because of its popularity and associations to Rap culture, the film inscribes anxieties toward danger and crime into public perception of 8 Mile Road and by extension, Detroit.³⁰ Since the film's release, Detroit residents note the frequency with which outsider discussion of the city leads to questions of 8 Mile and violence.³¹ Further, the wall is readily recognized as a restriction of opportunity for Detroit, one that many residents observe with contempt. Although popular media reduces connections with 8 Mile Road to crime or violence, Detroiters also recognize the spatial configurations inherent in the street's presence.

These spatial ramifications build from 8 Mile Road's function as Michigan's base line road, the boundary by which land is surveyed throughout the entire state. This line extends across the state, continuing further as the surveyed boundary of the Illinois-Wisconsin state borders if one were to draw a line through Lake Michigan from the road.³² Further, the designation '8 Mile' refers to the distance from the street to Detroit's epicenter, the One Campus Martius building. Additionally, 8 Mile Road is the northern boundary for Detroit's urban space. When one crosses 8 Mile Road to the north, you exit Detroit as a city space and

must negotiate a different space entirely, the suburbs. As a straight surveyed boundary to the city's north, the road becomes an invisible wall on its own because of the urban and suburban notations the street brings. So while 8 Mile Road holds a great deal of dramatized notions in popular culture, it also an important spatial utility as the distance from the city center to its furthest boundary. As this street works as the spatial marker for Detroit's urban boundary, the space is also grounded as a historical location of black and white tension as well. Much to do with the suburban division from the city, these spatial frameworks were often drawn up as a connection to racial disparity and discriminatory logics.

This border has stood in Detroit since the influx of migrant and black families in the early twentieth century and therefore possesses racial connotations as well. With the advent of urban sprawl throughout the twentieth-century, 8 Mile became a division of much more than domestic spaces, however. The boundary was made publicly notorious by five-term mayor Coleman Young's 1974 comments that the city's criminals should leave Detroit and "hit Eight Mile Road," a comment some argue cemented the racial divide between the city and suburbs after the 1967 uprising.³³ Since then, 8 Mile is mostly informed through popular representation of Detroit as "America's Most Dangerous City" and the aforementioned film, *8 Mile*, about the troubled, lower-class upbringing of Eminem.³⁴ Through these representations, 8 Mile Road functions not only as a symbol of poverty, but of racism and violence as well. Beyond popular culture, the road is the border of the suburban and metropolitan divide out of practical implications as well. With no public transit systems to cross the northern boundary, 8 Mile Road works as the large highway system making access to spaces outside of the city difficult to navigate, arguably trapping people in the confines of the city. In all, the pragmatic struggles of

border crossing along with popular representations of the street's meaning make 8 Mile Road a complicated symbol of division and tension for Detroit.

In the time since the legislative powers of the 8 Mile wall diminished, both black and white residents have gone on to occupy both sides of the site. The wall carries many names to those who regularly engage it, such the "Detroit Wailing Wall or Detroit's Berlin Wall."³⁵ While not as tall or imposing as the infamous German blockade, the Detroit site holds clear racial implications in its presence: keep black families away from white neighborhoods. In this way, the wall is similar to the Belfast Wall, an Irish structure built in the 1960s to divide housing lines between Protestant and Catholic communities.³⁶ But the 8 Mile wall's housing inhibitions have softened over time, whereas today the site is lamented for its origins for some, while others consider it a minor nuisance. As the city moved on from a time in which the wall held material implications, questions began to rise as to what should be done with the wall going forward. Late in 1988, a push by local Detroiters to tear the wall down fell short of getting permission by city officials. A few years later in the 1990s, neighbors around the wall petitioned to have wall made into a national monument. State officials rejected the petition, arguing the controversial history of the wall made it too contentious a site to declare a landmark.³⁷ During these years, Detroit endured steep financial decline, leading to the early 2000s when residents made the decision to alter the wall entirely. In 2004, the MCBB turned to the 8 Mile wall and launched an artistic campaign to transform the appearance and function of the blockade.

Today, the wall is painted with murals but also obstructed by years of unkempt foliage. Miller's work and the subsequent public additions depict scenes of civil rights victories, and others illustrate hopeful images of black men and women embracing one another. Where some

spaces of the wall are painted with vibrant images, other sections remain bare or are the base for illicit gang markings at some sections, marking the space as one of contestation. With much of the wall left to be finished, the wall arguably symbolizes Detroit as a whole, a city whose legacy is bound to controversy and civil rights accomplish, yet a great deal of space left to be written upon. Surrounding residents have mostly embraced the murals, since the grassroots project and their own gradual additions have both colored the relic and enhanced the spaces they call home. While the murals realign the wall as a canvas, the presence of surrounding homes and greenery rising after the wall's formation position it as a principle material site of the city.

Spatially, the wall definitively marks Detroit, as the city grows around the concrete slab outlining the northern neighborhood. And while decades of resistance reduced unjust legislative strength of the boundary, "8 Mile still serves as the racial line in the sand where blacks represent nearly 80 percent of the population south of the road and whites constitute 75 percent of those living north of road".³⁸ In my own encounters with the wall, its presence is ominous. As one approaches the site, its peculiar position as a literal break in residential neighborhoods and a nearby children's park make it an unavoidable object for resident's daily lives. Detroiters who need to traverse the city on their everyday commutes are obstructed by and forced to navigate a different path that is forced upon them. The boundary is by no means trivial either, as the half-mile distance and six-foot height mark it less as an obstructive nuisance and more as a prodigious fixture. The wall reflects the divisive racist roots from Detroit's checkered past, a past many citizens hope to overcome with the ongoing revitalization projects. Nearby residents openly discuss their longstanding struggle to make sense of the wall's role in

their own past and present lives of their children, but often follow such hesitations with optimism for what the wall has since become.³⁹ To illustrate the role of the 8 Mile wall in Detroit's ongoing redevelopment campaign, I consider how emergent memory helps us recognize how the site earns associations with civil rights, space, and culture. From the changes the murals produce and the community's regular engagement with the wall, I explain how the site's emergent memory achieves more dynamic purposes.

The wall's emergent rhetorics and mnemonic functions are further valuable because they represent a symbolic border division in the narrowed context of urban spaces in the United States. While border rhetoricians have studied the cultural ramifications of these arbitrary assignments from an international context, the presence of a border wall in Detroit bears similar influences on its adjacent communities.⁴⁰ The 8 Mile wall invites social constructs of division, hierarchy, and cultural import as it is installed upon the city and following the addition of the mural project, uses those same perspectives to redirect perceptions of the city. Yet, there has been little focus from rhetorical studies on the existence of these border walls as they emerge in domestic contexts and the persistent cultural memories they invite thereafter. That said, a more comprehensive reading of the wall as a border rhetoric invites an examination toward the wall's longstanding consequences and the artifact's legacy in shaping Detroit culturally and spatially.

Toward Emergent Memory

As a space of public memory, the wall recalls subjects of discriminatory struggle, but does so in a process distinct from sites like statues, museums, or commemorative practices. While rhetoric and memory scholars note a variety of mnemonic representations in our public

life, few consider how sites become mnemonic as a rhetorical outcome. For example, although Blair and Michel astutely argue the productive and performative features of memorials and whereas Katriel investigates the malleable nature of memory, these works direct their analyses toward texts created with commemorative purposes.⁴¹ When we turn to illustrations of memory that exist outside these manifested locations of remembrance, scholarship has mostly failed to identify how ordinary sites achieve mnemonic values and the cultural implications thereafter. While Bodnar's work draws a distinction between official and vernacular foundations of memory, his application of vernacular narrations is in the context of contested discourses against traditional acts of remembrance.⁴² Thus, I propose emergent memory as an extension to public memory studies to unearth how memories associated with non-commemorative sites like the 8 Mile wall surface.

I situate three qualities on the rhetorics of emergent memory that connect its position as a conceptual extension of public memory. I will later elaborate on these features through the wall's demonstration of these tenets before delving into the intriguing role the murals hold in the site's current mnemonic function. First, emergent memory results from moments of controversy, such as traumatic or highly mediatized events, moving associations of said event as noteworthy or otherwise unforgettable. Second, such memories are sustained through regular engagement, ensuring their implications are maintained and do not decay over time. Third, emergent memories are constitutive in function, in that they mark cultural traits or provincial qualities to implicated communities. In the 8 Mile wall there rhetorics of emergent memory calcify for residents, defining the space in which they live and shaping a culture tied to

their city. An application of emergent memory in this case reveals the dynamic origins of public memories and the crucial function they hold in shaping this urban public.

Emergent memory in the 8 Mile wall initiates out of its origins as a material structure meant to shape the lives of residents by reifying racially charged segregation. As an object built to divide and re-inscribe racial division, the site is steeped in controversy, tormenting those continually forced under the symbolic weight of the wall's presence. While I do not equivocate the histories of the 8 Mile Wall and Young's work on Holocaust memory, his work demonstrates the role of extreme affective experiences such as trauma; a condition I defend is present in these residents with their suffering from systemic white supremacy. Through his work, we see the transformative potency of traumatic memory, reasoning that experiences of suffering are etched into the mind.⁴³ I argue that the traumatic grounds of the wall itself are what mark it as a site of emergent memory, as the wall's existence is a radical response to black housing progress with cases like Ossian Sweet's and the dissolution of restrictive covenants. Cultural trauma, then, is tied to the site's material and symbolic implications: a reinforcement of white supremacy and assurance of stymied opportunity. Materially, the wall draws a line in Detroit space, ascribing opportunity to one side and subjugation or inferiority to the other. Whereas symbolically, the site reflects a historically concerted effort to rhetorically embolden white supremacy during an already contentious struggle against Jim Crow policies in the 1940s. The construction of the 8 Mile wall on the edges of the black neighborhood is a disturbing reminder on both symbolic and material planes of disaffiliation for Detroit and its residents fighting for equal treatment. Put another way, the timing of the wall demonstrates to black citizens that

while they may overcome legislative practices, they will never achieve the affiliations or opportunities they long for.

As such, the wall embodies the first tenet of emergent memory rhetoric: a response to an intensely controversial moment in time. Consequent response, then, is the emergence of memories locating the wall's bearings beyond the creation of the all-white neighborhood and limiting black mobility. Emergent memory situates the wall as a material recall toward decades of civil rights struggle prior to the wall, and decades of similar struggle to follow. This same emergent memory speaks to associations with the civil rights struggle as a whole. Despite the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement, many see the wall as a reminder of the injustices supposedly defeated by the 1960s movement. Similarly, the wall is recognized as a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement's incompletions, that the movement was incapable of eliminating the racial injustices it is traditionally celebrated for. The materialization of emergent memory in the wall therefore recalls a civil rights era in Detroit where, despite legislative triumphs, material divisions still exist. The connection to a controversial episode in Detroit history locates the wall's associations to civil rights legacies that toppled the legislative powers behind the wall, but simultaneously signifies the civil rights injustices left behind in the traditional movement narrative.

As the origins of an emergent memory are rooted in notable experiences, their regular maintenance allows them to persevere over time. As with public memory, emergent memories are at risk of fading over time if they are not regularly observed. The wall mitigates this threat through the everyday practice and routine engagement the site commands. Local residents like McClendon and Moon remark how the daily exercise of walking around the wall to go to school

forced them to think about its meanings.⁴⁴ These experiences suture associations with the wall to the individual, disallowing them from ignoring or avoiding the connotation of the wall's presence. Further, the 8 Mile wall's fixture in spaces of private property, backyards, and local parks speaks to the practices of everyday encounters that chisel the experiences of the site into public consciousness. Therefore, daily encounters with the 8 Mile wall and its legacies embolden the persistence of these emergent memories, marking the wall as a salient reflection of Detroit's segregated past and in many ways, its present.⁴⁵ Moreover, the unremarkable makeup of the wall as an otherwise ordinary slab of concrete make it an intriguing site of material memory, which has since become an overlooked remnant of civil right struggles from Detroit's history.

Finally, the presence of emergent memories seized in and circulated through the 8 Mile wall endures through the forces of cultural configuration the wall applies. As a branch of the larger 8 Mile narrative throughout Detroit, the wall is situated as a constitutive device in rhetorical place making and affiliation for the city. The consequences of the white exodus, or "white flight" from Detroit are seen in modern characteristics shaping the city, most notably the demographics across the city's boundaries.⁴⁶ Specifically, in the 8 Mile corridor where the wall stands, these same racial fault lines exist today, sustaining over seventy years of change. For example, the wall's adjacent neighborhood, Ferndale remains 84% white according to a recent survey. Just south of this neighborhood across the 8 Mile border, the population remains at a 78% black occupancy.⁴⁷ Thus, the wall and the 8 Mile road it stretches from are decisive demographic markers of affiliation and mobility for Detroit. Implications like race, class, and the urban/suburban division are drawn from the street, symbolically extended into the wall. As an

appendage of the 8 Mile road, the wall holds rhetorical weight in constituting Detroit community because of the connections to affiliation, social class, and opportunity embedded in its space. As the wall stands on the northern outskirts of the city, it informs those living within its confines they are situated in Detroit space, a space mired by a legacy of discrimination.

Most fascinating however, a call toward emergent memory in the context of Detroit and the 8 Mile wall reveals a redirected social function toward these same memories of civil rights, everyday experience, and constitutive forces in this urban space. Emergent civil rights memory in a city like Detroit is crucial when contemplating how the movement is remembered in a space underappreciated in the traditional movement narrative. The focus of the murals not only locates the legacy of the movement as triumphant, but directly connects the movement to the Detroit as well. The influence of the wall in the everyday experience for some Detroiters compels us to consider how its emergent memories endure over time and what role they have in shaping residents. As such, the educational and productive advanced by the mural project retain the regular engagement with the site, but in a wholly different manner than before their additions. And while emergent memories associated with the wall are constitutive in terms of space, place, and culture for the city, the sentiment associated with these constitutions are not beyond revision. With the addition of the mural project, we see how emergent memories are not necessarily supplanted by a shift in function, but are repositioned in a way that nuances the emergent memory's meanings.

A Wall of Memory

In 1988, John George started the non-profit organization behind the mural project, the Motor City Blight Busters. A native Detroit, George believes, "Blight is a form of child abuse,

to allow your children to grow up in and around trash.”⁴⁸ The organization has been busy since their start, and today is one of the leading forces rebuilding Detroit by demolishing abandoned sites of blight to rebuild new housing developments or businesses. But rather than spearhead a similar campaign to demolish the wall, the MCBB chose to rebuild the structure, using it to inspire Detroit’s black community by transforming a space of historically black suppression. The decision to rebuild the very structure meant to divide its adjoining black community proved controversial, but the organization saw the project as a public display of Detroit’s cultural resilience. “I call it the Detroit attitude. We just don’t give up. No matter how hard you pummel us, we just wipe it off and go to work” George said.⁴⁹ For a wall that, to this point, was a reflection of historical subjugation, George commissioned local artists to reclaim the artifact from a legacy of white supremacy. At the project’s start, Detroit was on the verge of bankruptcy and its residents longed for a chance to salvage their city. George viewed the project as being “Important to take something built to divide people and see if we can bring people together.”⁵⁰ As a site running through people’s backyards and standing as a border of historical oppression, the wall was the perfect object to retake in a campaign to move the community forward.

The murals cover a range of subjects, from portraits of civil rights heroines like Rosa Parks and Harriett Tubman, to artistic renderings of the March for Jobs and the Underground Railroad.⁵¹ Where some murals pay tribute to individual figures or events, others are more abstract in design. In all, the murals promote local discussion on the wall’s function in Detroit’s future and the role of citizens in reclaiming contentious spaces. With these visual forces, the wall secures rhetorical values that appeal to the initial emergent memories aligned with the wall. The mural project addresses the emergent memories generated over time and enriches

them with a vision toward their role in the city's future. Toward the city's civil rights legacy, for example, a twofold approach toward remembering the struggle and Detroit's role in the movement extends from the wall.

Public memory of the Civil Rights Movement in northern states is nothing less than complicated, as traditional narrative paint the north with the broad brush of progressive ideology. This incomplete perspective is particularly problematic for Detroit because before and after the King years of the Civil Rights Movement, the city was immersed in struggles widely overlooked by public memory of civil rights struggle. Detroit historian Kevin Boyle warns us, "...the popular story of Detroit must be traced not to the events of 1967, but to white Detroiters and institutions they controlled like housing."⁵² As such, the wall is a key material reference of these struggles; representing the segregated housing troubles that plagued the city before and haunt it today. For Detroit native Thomas Sugrue, "It's the most obvious, most blatant symbol of racial division."⁵³ While Detroit was the setting for many moments in the Civil Rights Movement, the wall has gone on to symbolize the movement's shortcomings and incomplete reality. Forced to encounter the material remainders of their city's segregated past, residents confront the wall and immediately recognize that traditional accomplishments attached to the movement's narrative were limited in certain contexts. These traditional stories of the civil rights struggle are linear, typically marked by the loss of martyrs like King, and culminating in victories like the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968. Where these traditional narratives neatly conclude in the late 1960s, the 8 Mile wall reminds us that while the movement brought monumental progress, it was not successful in eradicating most issues entirely. Instead, the wall's emergent memory as a complicated space prevails, reminding those

who move in and around it that Detroit's civil rights struggles continue well beyond the Civil Rights Movement.

Including the murals, though, does not simply take this sober memory of civil rights and wipe it away. Instead, the project makes use of these memories and realigns them to an association with connection and accomplishment. Images of the March for Jobs and local heroes like Rosa Parks reflect Detroit's critical role in the movement of the past and the movement to come, a northern attachment to the movement not typically recognized in popular history. Until this point, the emergent memory of the wall reflected incomplete realities of the civil rights victories since residents regularly confronted an overt remainder of housing discrimination. But the site's transformation uses these memories to express potential for Detroit's future. Now, the wall no longer singularly reflects shortcomings of civil rights legislation, it also displays Detroit's role in the movement and a resolute pride the city cultivates as they build toward a better future. Moreover, the murals do not entirely cover the wall, suggesting the space as a work in progress, much like the continuing fight for civil rights. "Did it make me angry to see that wall up there? It was something you grow accustomed to...but you can't stop progress, don't care how hard you try" McClendon stated.⁵⁴ Instead of allowing these ghosts of segregation to trap the community in a mindset that the movement failed them in one way or another, the wall is taken back by neighbors like McClendon who have their eyes set on the progress of tomorrow.

From these emergent memories of civil rights history, the wall rhetorically strengthens through regular engagement by those around it. That is, the site extends an experiential force on those who encounter the site, shaping their concept of Detroit space. For one resident near

the wall, “I’m 63 years old and not much has changed...there are [still] places in the surrounding community I know I’m not going to be treated fairly.”⁵⁵ Her sentiment is not surprising, given the sustained racial demography between Detroit and its suburbs. With little progress in housing mobility over time, the wall works as a testament where the remains of segregation extend around the city’s recognized borders. The emergent rhetoric of the wall profiles the cities spatial boundaries and with the onset of the mural project; these implications are again linked. But to understand how the murals shift the emergent rhetorics of space and place in Detroit, consider the wall’s spatiality before the mural additions. As a branch of the larger ‘trunk’ of 8 Mile Road, the wall is a material icon of spatial distinctions from 8 Mile’s social alignment. In its inception, the wall was a marker of racial limitations to the prospects of housing opportunity. Extending from a road historically associated with racial tensions, the wall “...was meant less to check physical movement or subdue racism than to project racial divides further into collective imagination” writes historian Paul Mullins.⁵⁶ In other words, along with the wall’s material role in drawing up neighborhood boundaries, it signifies the obstructed potential for housing mobility for black residents. Residents near the wall encounter it on a daily basis during commutes to work or school, repeatedly exposing them to the site’s implications. “We knew it was a segregation wall, but our parents didn’t talk about it. I guess it was taboo to say what it was,” one resident recalls.⁵⁷ Today, the wall is a scar on the very fabric of Detroit, a material wound of racism that stands as a fixture of the city’s landscape.

Yet, if we examine the addition of the 2006 murals to a site marked by such obvious lines of difference, something more compelling surfaces. This is not to say the murals change or revise emergent memories from decades ago, but instead use those mnemonic associations

and reposition them for a different, productive purpose. In one section of the mural, an illusory image displays a section of the wall demolished, enabling sight into yards only a few feet away but obscured by the wall's presence. This abstract image features a typical Detroit house with lush grass, a wood deck, and sunny skies. Neighbors behind the wall are incapable of seeing this yard, but the mural allows them to imagine as if the wall were not present. Where the wall is still a marker of imagined borders like 8 Mile Road or boundaries between Detroit and surrounding suburbs, the murals now promote an experience of seeing through its existence. The piece symbolizes a potential to see beyond spatial distinctions the wall brings, because if the wall were not there to reify black and white spaces, residents would instead be able to engage their neighbors. Similarly, another stretch of the wall is painted with images of colorful houses lined up one after another. These simple illustrations are also surrounded by depictions of neighbors smiling and standing together. In this sense, not only do these renderings imagine an alternative vision for the community, they reconfigure the nature of the site itself.

For decades, the 8 Mile wall was a colorless and blank fixture, but now stands as a vibrant canvas from the imagination of the surrounding Detroit community. That said, the murals do not overwrite the aforementioned emergent memories of Detroit's struggle. The wall still reflects a connection to the connotations of 8 Mile Road and still divides two neighborhoods in a historically segregated site. But with black neighbors now occupying both sides of the wall, its material function for segregation has been lost and is now an echo of the past. Neighbors have gone on to make use of this vestige and position it as a tool that educates young people just as effectively as it holds the vines that climb it. "Do I want it torn down? Heck no. No, its not a stain to me...Its astounding to us that people are astounded by it, that's just

how we feel. You know, this is our city. It will always be our city regardless of who comes or what's done. We just don't want to be forgotten about," Moon adds.⁵⁸ For residents like her, the wall is a part of Detroit now and should remain that way. And while the wall represents painful memories that emerged over a difficult period for Detroiters, those recollections are now a tool for residents like Moon to ensure the city does not run away from its past.

The presence of the 8 Mile wall also assigns meaning to Detroit's position as an urban space and the qualities that define this city space. Put another way, the wall operates as a material device of constitutive rhetoric, forming the city around it and those living outside its boundaries. In the years following the wall's production in 1941, the site inscribes associations with 8 mile to the adjacent neighborhood and Detroit's urban divide as well. In other words, the wall works as an informal border for Detroiters as it marks residents with their affiliation with the city. Years ago, this mark was almost entirely on the grounds of race and class, gripping the community in segregation. Given that space beyond the wall represented suburban aspirations and economic mobility, those forced to live behind it are anchored in a suppressive social position. To be behind the wall is to be bound not only to Detroit's urban space, but to the limits imposed on the city's black residents as well. Further, as we encounter the wall, it's social implications reach well beyond the half-mile length, as these same limitations continue to as a reality for many of Detroit's black community today. Stuck behind a wall of economic, educational, and social margins that Detroit's spatial boundaries represent, the 8 Mile wall ties residents to this predicament, building an unlikelihood of their prospective resistance.

And yet, these constitutive memories are confronted and redirected with the mural project. The illustrations confront the manner in which the constitutive memories emerge from

the wall's presence and revisits how the site shapes its routine audiences. For Chazz Miller, the initial artist commissioned for the project, the murals demonstrate the city is moving forward rather than holding onto the emotions of past. "Its up to us to not cry on what's gone. Lets focus on what we have...we need to get people out to do these kinds of projects so they can have the kinds of conversations and get to know their neighbors. The spirit of Detroit motivates us to work hard and persevere. To keep going," Miller says.⁵⁹ By making use of an object meant to divide a population and thereafter salvaging it to bind that same community together years later, the wall's constitutive forces turn. The wall still maintains its role as an associative tool for the city, but now makes use of these associations by appealing to the city's resilient essence. Rather than the murals washing away the affiliations to the city and all it means, they inject sentiments of joy in the strength that defines Detroit. The murals accept that the wall outlines communities through their relation to Detroit and instead of aligning this reality with a sense of shame, does so with pride. Despite having the change to destroy the wall in the early 2000s, this community chose to unite and preserve the controversial site for the good of their city going forward. By exercising its own agency in taking back the wall and redefining the space, the community refused to allow the city's checkered history to continue restraining their future. As the wall became an emergent force in defining the city through memories of racist practice, the murals challenge their suppressive qualities, emanating a tenacious character that is definitively Detroit.

Emergent Memory: Constitutive Mnemonics

In this chapter, I argued the 8 Mile wall as a material site of public memory that channels allusions toward issues of civil rights, urban space, and Detroit culture. These public

memories arise through a process I introduce here as emergent memory, a rhetorical feature that explains how places of our everyday lives produce memory in spite of their non-commemorative origins. Acknowledging a segregation relic in Detroit as a site of memory is of particular significance because the wall nuances our understanding of sites, places, and spaces where memory rests. The 8 Mile wall is also an interesting space to contemplate memory because of its legacy in Detroit housing segregation along with recent work to reclaim the wall through a community mural project. In a time of widespread Detroit changes, the 8 Mile wall becomes a site that helps define the emergent rhetorics of residential agency while also defining the boundaries of Detroit space. Overall, emergent memory as a conceptual extension to public memory studies enhances our recognition of where public memories exist in material contexts, and how they rhetorically surface. To date, while memory scholarship includes analyses on the shifts in mnemonic meanings over time and the politicized nature of public memory, few studies inquire as to how memory emerges from public agency specifically. Moreover, the 8 Mile wall is a memory structure where public agency builds in the community's reclamation of the site to use as a pedagogical tool and bind the city's legacy to the space they inhabit.

From a grassroots effort to transform a discriminatory relic from 1941, the mural project on the 8 Mile wall enriches extent emergent memories affiliated with the wall. Memory extending from the wall informs the means by which contiguous publics remember the civil rights struggle, along with cultural memories that define Detroit's character. Rather than meet these emergent narratives and revise or rewrite them, the murals redirect their perspective. That is, while emergent memories previous to the murals reflect the grief of civil rights

shortcomings, the wall now emanates notions of possibility and optimistic reflection of these civil rights triumphs and Detroit's role in their accomplishment. Likewise, where emergent memories of spatial configuration bound the wall to divisive associations or alienation, the murals augment them to an experiential landscape of seeing through its materiality and beyond its boundaries. And toward the emergent constitutive memories that once defined communities by suppressed opportunities for progress or change, the murals enhance the wall to a site that emboldens the community around it, marking them with a resilient sentiment.

The 8 Mile wall is a vehicle of persistent memory where the emergence of mnemonic associations rhetorically shift over time but prevail from the significance this peculiar site holds in Detroit. This community and its collection of artists effectively reclaim the wall, the implications of which remain to be seen as Detroit continues to rapidly change. Their efforts make use of painful memories of the past; folding them into a site of public deliberation that now projects optimism for the city's future. Sites similar to the 8 Mile wall, those left behind in the wake of society's march forward beg further question as to how materials from the past define the communities that rise around them? Moreover, emergent memory compels us to consider how we accept relics of controversial origin in a world where we rush to move forward from the contentious legacies they represent.⁶⁰ While Detroit is engrossed in a period of dynamic change, the presence of emergent memory in sites like the 8 Mile wall illustrate the hold our past has on our present and future, regardless of the obscure spaces these memories emerge from.

The wall's reclamation speaks to the object's position as a significant artifact as the city moves forward in its redevelopment. While generations of Detroiters who grew up around the

wall may have wished at the time for the barrier to be torn down, the mural project's seizing the wall works as an exercise in public agency to bind its legacy to the city's present and future. As I mentioned earlier, the wall generates spatial distinctions across the city and while these were previously installed sentiments of opportunity or disenfranchisement, they now invite readings of community pride and resilience. But in light of the city's larger redevelopment, the wall's emergent memories of spatial rhetorics work in tandem with Detroiters' attempts to retain a place in the city's promising future. Thus, the wall and its residential mural project position a retaliatory feature, as narrations surrounding the city seem to gloss over or neglect its legacy of dismissing its own people. Residents use the wall to recoup a thread of the city's past that directly counters efforts to wash these contentious legacies away while simultaneously inviting Detroiters to take pride in the civil rights progress they have directly taken part in.

Ultimately, emergent memories aligned with the 8 Mile wall serve a protective purpose of the city's past that go on to mark the material space of Detroit. In many ways, the 8 Mile wall stands like a scar on the Detroit spatiality that was recently dejected to its lowest point but is now a space of opportunity and promise. In these moments, it is easy to collectively look back on objects like a discriminatory relic, dismiss their importance, and have them demolished. But Detroiters have instead taken the opportunity to protect the wall's presence and repurpose it in order to achieve several rhetorical feats that the wall deposits. Transforming the wall from a divisive object to a reflective canvas not only improves the visual aesthetics of the surrounding neighborhood, but also ensures that the ugly past that grounds the concrete frontier cannot fade away. Moreover, the 8 Mile wall's seizure by longstanding Detroiters enables the

community to exercise a productive agency in voicing a defiant call that any vision of Detroit's future is the product of the past displayed on the wall. That past is one residents of this primarily black community helped build and defend in its toughest times and should therefore have a place in its future. The Detroit public's engagement with the 8 Mile wall appeals to the notion that Detroit functions as an urban palimpsest because the rhetorical productions that emerge from the site's memory do not disappear in the face of renewal, they mark the city. Yes, these memories change to a certain extent, in that residential sentiments toward these emergent memories shift from pain to pride, but their mnemonic associations toward controversy, spatiality, and cultural constructs persevere nonetheless. Thus, the wall's scarring consequences prevail, but the social interpretations of their presence shift as Detroit transitions from a position of decline to restoration. As an urban palimpsest, one of the mnemonic pillars producing an inescapable mark on Detroit is thus located in the wall, an artifact of emergent memory rhetorics that preserve a complicated past that is repurposed and amended to more unifying ends for the city's future.

Notes

¹ Elizabeth Baker & Matthew Schwartz, "In Detroit, a mural stands as a reminder of the city's 'segregation wall'" (NPR, 2017) <http://www.npr.org/2017/07/22/538760677/in-detroit-a-colorful-mural-stands-as-a-reminder-of-the-citys-segregation-wall>

² W Kim Heron, "The kiss, the wall & other true tales" (Metro Times, 2002)

³ Sarah Hulett, "Racial, Regional divide still haunts Detroit's progress" (NPR, 2012) <http://www.npr.org/2012/09/11/160768981/racial-regional-divide-still-haunt-detroits-progress>

⁴ Elizabeth Baker & Matthew Schwartz, "In Detroit, a mural stands"

⁵ Elizabeth Baker & Matthew Schwartz, "In Detroit, a mural stands"

⁶ Sarah Hulett, "Racial, Regional divide"

⁷ Ian Goodwin, "Theorizing Community as discourse in community informatics: "resistance communities" and contested technologies," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 9, issue 1, 47-66.

⁸ For more on the role of public sites and performances shaping public identity, see: Maurice Charland, "Constitutive rhetoric: the case of the people Québécois," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73, issue 2 (1987) 133. Ian Goodwin's work in "Theorizing Community" also contributes to our understanding as to how cultural objects and discourses define sense of community.

⁹ Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford, *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2006 pp. 137-144)

¹⁰ Laura McAtackney, "Peace maintenance and political messages: The significance of walls during and after the Northern Irish 'troubles,'" *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 11 (2011) 77-98.

¹¹ Kirt H Wilson, "Interpreting the Discursive Field of the Montgomery Bus Boycott: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Holt Street Address" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 8, issue 4 (2005) 299-326.

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¹³ Greg Dickinson and Giorgia Aiello, "Being through there matters: Materiality, bodies, and movement in urban communication research," *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 2016, pp. 1294-1308.

¹⁴ Michael Middleton, Samantha Senda-Cook, & Danielle Endres, "Articulating rhetorical field methods" *Western Journal of Communication*, 75 (issue 4), 2011, pp. 386-406

¹⁵ Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) 36-41. Andrew Jones, *Memory and Material Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 40.

¹⁶ Laura McAtackney, "Peace maintenance and political messages"

¹⁷ Marouf Hasian & Rulon Wood, "Critical museology, colonial communication, and the gradual at The Royal Museum for Central Africa," *Western Journal of Communication*, 74(issue 2), 2010, 128-149.

¹⁵ Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) 47-48.

¹⁶ Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 268.

¹⁷ Scott Martelle, *Detroit: A Biography* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2014) 19-21.

²¹ Joe T Darden and Richard W Thomas, *Detroit: Race riots, racial conflicts, and efforts to bridge the racial divide* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2013).

²² United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Understanding Fair Housing* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1973).

²³ Joe T. Darden & Richard C Hill, June Thomas, and Richard Thomas, *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press) 67-91.

²⁴ Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh administration, race relations, and the Detroit riot of 1967* (East Lansing: MI, Michigan State University Press, 2007).

²⁵ Phyllis Vine, *One Man's Castle: Clarence Darrow in defense of the American Dream* (New York: NY, HarperCollins, 2004)

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, p.268.

²⁸ David Maraniss, *Once in a Great City* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 39.

²⁹ Eric King Watts, "Border Patrolling and Passing in Eminem's 8 Mile," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 22, issue 3 (2005) 187-206.

³⁰ Jeff Rice, *Digital Detroit: Rhetoric and Space in the age of the network* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012)

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- ³¹ Paul Harris, "Eight Miles of Murder" (*The Guardian*, April 2006) Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/apr/16/usa.paulharris>
- ³² David Maraniss, *Once in a Great City*
- ³³ Paul Clemens, *Made in Detroit: A Memoir* (New York: NY, Random House, 2006).
- ³⁴ Eric King Watts, "Border Patrolling"
- ³⁵ Sarah Hulett, "Racial, Regional divide"
- ³⁶ Vicky Costick, *Belfast: Toward a city without walls* (Newtownards, Northern Ireland, 2015).
- ³⁷ Denise Guerra, "In Detroit, A colorful mural stands as a reminder of the city's segregation wall" (NPR, July 2017) <http://wamc.org/post/detroit-colorful-mural-stands-reminder-city-segregation-wall>
- ³⁸ David Maraniss, *Once in a Great City*, p.19
- ³⁹ These sentiments were conveyed to me on two separate occasions where I traveled to the wall and neighbors approached me to discuss my interest in the wall.
- ⁴⁰ Robert DeChaine, *Border Rhetorics: Citizenship and identity in the US-Mexico Frontier*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010)
- ⁴¹ Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics: The Rhetorical Performances of the Civil Rights Memorial" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30, issue 1 (2000) 31–55; Tamar Katriel, "Sites of memory: Discourses of the past in Israeli pioneering settlement museums" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80, issue 1 (1994) 1-20
- ⁴² John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993)
- ⁴³ James E Young, *The texture of memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994)
- ⁴⁴ Elizabeth Baker & Matthew Schwartz, "In Detroit, a mural stands"
- ⁴⁵ Denise Guerra, "In Detroit, A colorful mural stands"
- ⁴⁶ David Maraniss, *Once in a Great City*

⁴⁷ These statistics are pulled from a census data website, most recently updated in 2015. Their database enables searches to specific regions and neighborhoods, allowing comparative statistics as well. See “Geo data of Ferndale, MI” *datausa.io*, Accessed July 28, 2017, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/ferndale-mi/>

⁴⁸ Marge Sorge, “Blight Busters’ John George and his determination to rid Detroit of blight,” (Detroit, MI: The Detroit Hub, September, 2015).

⁴⁹ Neal Rubin, “Wall separating black, white Detroit gets mural” (Detroit, MI: *The Detroit News*, 2006).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A saga of race, civil rights, and murder in the Jazz Age* (New York, NY: Picador Press, 10)

⁵³ Elizabeth Baker & Matthew Schwartz, “In Detroit, a mural stands”

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Robin Schwartz, “Built to separate black and white neighborhoods, the wall still stands today” *Detroit Jewish News* (January 15, 2017).

⁵⁶ Paul Mullins, “The ruins of racism” *Archaeology and Material Culture* (blog) February, 2017 <https://paulmullins.wordpress.com/tag/detroit/>

⁵⁷ Sarah Hulett, “Racial, Regional divide”

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Baker & Matthew Schwartz, “In Detroit, a mural stands”

⁵⁹ Jeff Karoub, “Wall that once divided races in Detroit remains, teaches,” *USA Today*, May 2013, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/05/01/detroit-race-wall/2127165/>

Chapter 4 PERSISTENT MEMORY: THE 1967 UPRISING AND 12TH STREET

Over time, Detroit has hosted moments of individual resistance like the case of Ossian Sweet as well as extended periods of outright discriminatory harassment as we see in the community subjected to the 8 Mile wall. Yet, no sequence of events impacted this city quite like a five-day eruption of civic unrest in July 1967. During what is known as “the long hot summer” of 1967, 159 episodes of violent rebellion shook American cities as black residents mobilized during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. In Detroit, tensions hit their breaking point after a late-night conflict with police at an unlicensed bar led to five days of violence where residents watched businesses burn as tanks rolled through their city. For many residents, the primary concern in July 1967 was a broken relationship between black citizens and the city’s police force. Police misconduct has since become the focus of stories surrounding why Detroit’s summer of ’67 happened, but in truth, a litany of issues drove Detroit to the brink. Along with police brutality, struggles with segregated housing, systemic discrimination in education, and economic immobility cultivated heightened sentiments of resentment and anger. The summer of 1967’s outcome was catastrophic as 43 people died, thousands injured, over 7,000 arrested, and 2,000 buildings and businesses destroyed. In a city already destabilized by white flight and the resulting job relocation to the suburbs, the aftermath of the 1967 uprising delivered a blow to Detroit that, many argue, the city has yet to recover from.

In July 2017, Detroit paid tribute to the 50th anniversary of its own legacy with the long hot summer, opening old wounds for some while advancing important discussions for others. Fifty years removed from the chaos of the uprising, a mere four years have also passed since Detroit’s stunning bankruptcy declaration in 2013. As the city rebuilds, a debate spread across

the city: how should residents appropriately remember the summer of 1967? As the city rebounds from ruin, it does so in a city space still bearing the wounds of 1967. Moreover, many of the same issues that drove Detroiters to such desperate lengths in the summer of 1967 still prevail today, leading critics to wonder what Detroit has learned from the uprising and what measures have been applied to ensure these events do not re-emerge. And as Detroit looks back on fifty years since it burned from within, modern predicaments in Baltimore, Chicago, and Milwaukee bear striking resemblances to 1967 Detroit. In many ways, the events of 1967 and their continued influence on Detroit fifty years later work as a warning about the consequences of unresolved racial tensions in our city spaces. While other cities and their residents see Detroit's decline as a cautionary tale, Detroit itself wrestles with how to appropriately remember a period of time where its community imploded. How we remember these events is particularly puzzling since prior to 2017, the city had no public commemoration to recognize the summer of 1967. But with the rapid changes sweeping across areas in Detroit, the city reminds us that the summer of 1967 has yet to be reconciled. While the city praises itself for attracting startup businesses and younger crowds to the redeveloping areas of the city, we should ask ourselves: how are memories of controversial events like the 1967 conflict addressed? How does their legacy's presence shape this urban space? Lastly, can Detroit simply wash away the past without engaging innovative efforts to reconcile the uprising's memory?

To address these broad inquiries, I ask three specific questions concerning present efforts to remember 1967: First, how does the absence of specific sites and spaces from the 1967 rebellion form public memory? Second, in what ways has the political and mediated maneuvers of identifying 12th Street and the five-day uprising as a riot rather than a rebellion

insinuate public culpability for the event's aftermath? And third, how does public amnesia and forgetting in relation to the 1967 uprising influence the community's ability to move past the events and how does the 50th anniversary address these concerns? In all, I argue that three types of rhetoric shape memories about the summer of 1967, ultimately exposing shortcomings for a city in need of closure. Through rhetorics of absence, identification, and forgetting, I suggest that public memories of the summer of 1967 reflect a condition of public amnesia. This amnesia enables Detroit's authority figures to avoid assuming responsibility for the systemic issues that lead to the 1967 uprising and hastily moved the public past those events. The 50th anniversary plays a crucial role in this discussion of public memory, as it emerges as a resuscitated period of publicly discussing the events of 1967. Overall, I suggest that the memory of 1967 holds implications for the city's effort to rebuild itself and underscores how Detroit's past operates as a disruptive mark that shapes the city's present and future.

Before moving on, I would like to note here how I refer to the five summer days that are the focus of this chapter. As many Detroiters argue in their own conversations of 1967, the label used to describe the event is a controversial rhetorical maneuver. Later, a portion of this chapter explores the labels used for these events; however, for the sake of clarity, I refer to 1967 as a rebellion or uprising, not simply as a riot. While it is true that riots took place during those five July days in 1967, I argue that the importance of 1967 is that these riots operated in a larger context as a rebellion against white supremacy and institutional marginalization. Overall, the chapter examines how two lines of rhetoric affect public memory about 1967. First, I explore how the coalescence of absence, identification, and public forgetting discourses produced public amnesia, which persists for decades thereafter. Second, I examine the city's

treatment of the 50th anniversary during its redevelopment, and assess it as a reconciliatory effort to acknowledge the faults of the past for the promise of the future. I begin this chapter by detailing the historical context that drove people to erupt in rebellion. After tracing these various causes, I turn to the events of July 23-28, the uprising itself. I then move to the city's actions in response and overall failure to reconcile this conflict, before finally exploring how memories of the 1967 uprising are forgotten or remembered, and the manner in which these mnemonic elements hang over the city's future.

Detroit 1967: Collected Tensions

In a 2017 project lead by Joel Stone and The Detroit Historical Society, several talented Detroit artists, educators, and leaders published a collection of essays reflecting on the summer of 1967. The volume features dozens of essays, underlining a litany of issues that plagued Detroit leading up to the uprising. In one piece, Melba Boyd recounts, "The police. It's always the police. If you were black and living in pre-Coleman Young Detroit, you never called the police for help because they only made matters worse."¹ Thomas Klug, on the other hand, argues, "the economic effects of plant closings rippled through Detroit's retail sector and housing stock and left swaths of the city's commercial arteries and working-class neighborhoods in decay." For William Winkel, the ever-present issue of housing equality was an overwhelming force for Detroiters. He explains, "Housing was a constant problem. One hundred thousand new units were built between 1945 and 1950, but only two percent were available to people of color."² Overall, there is no singular cause of the uprising, but a number of problems that bred sentiments of anger, frustration, and resentment to fester over time. This collection of controversial injustices steadily wore down the members of the black

community until a kairotic moment where they had reached their breaking point. Thus, we should not mistake the rebellion as an immediate extension of the Civil Rights Movement simply because it took place at its height in the 1960s. Instead, we must recognize that the struggles behind the 1967 uprising were years in the making and the manner in which they are remembered potentially holds implications for Detroit's redevelopment.

To better understand the fusion of sociopolitical elements driving the uprising, we should consider the racist underpinnings upon which they were predicated. Sugrue suggests that while the causes of the riot may be dynamic and difficult to untangle, they each are grounded in what many Detroiters saw as an illegitimacy of white authority. For Sugrue, "what happened in Detroit and other cities can be understood only in the broadest historical context. Clashes on the city's streets reflected a long, unresolved history of racial conflict...submerged beneath historical consciousness."³ In the time since 1967, some have gone so far as to suggest that the genesis of these conflicts had more to do with social class along with the steady decline of the auto industry.⁴ But these associations diminish the role of systemic discrimination in Detroit's decline, and deflect culpability from official city or state forces to more ambiguous social factors. Conversely, history illustrates how the motivations behind the uprising are rooted in concerted discrimination on an institutional level to obstruct opportunities for Detroit's black residents. As we consider institutional contexts like education, economics, and police brutality, we see a complicated web that triggered the summer of 1967.

Just as the conventional narrative of the Civil Rights Movement begins with the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v Board of Education*, one of Detroit's most overtly discriminatory practices was also rooted in education. While the 1954 decision declared

segregated schooling unconstitutional, cities like Detroit circumvented the ruling by restricted busing options to schools. The subsequent exodus of white families meant a loss in their tax contributions as well, leaving many schools without the teachers, supplies, or funding necessary to remain open, forcing families to send their students to further or more expensive schools. By 1967, officials estimated that the cost to educate a black child in Detroit was double that of a white child, a cost that continued to balloon as a result of white communities refusing to cohabit Detroit's city spaces.⁵

Coupled with the steady drain on federal funds to Detroit's public schooling, Detroit's economy was another prominent issue that sparked racial tensions in the mid-1960s. Sidney Fine reports that in July 1967, Detroit's unemployment sat at 6.2 percent, but black unemployment rate in the city was between 25 and 30 percent.⁶ Contrary to conventional thought that the 1967 uprising led to sharp declines in automotive jobs and increases in unemployment, conditions leading up to 1967 were bleak to begin with. By the 1960s, Detroit's automotive industry was steeped in a decade-long decline. While Detroit's "Big-3" automakers Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors enjoyed manufacturing success during WWII, the years after focused on relocation and labor optimization. Companies began moving manufacturing facilities from Detroit to the surrounding suburbs to address two problems facing the companies: the costs of land and property use; and the rise of the United Automobile Workers (UAW).⁷ With the increase in union presence and resulting worker strikes, work shifted to other factories.⁸ Initially, the struggles between the Big-3 and the UAW did not affect profit or job production, but instead, the period between 1948 and 1956 saw growth in the companies. Yet, this growth occurred in spaces outside of Detroit, hitting a peak in 1967. From 1958 to 1967,

production workers living in Detroit grew by 33 percent, but over 60 percent of these jobs were located outside of the city.⁹ The effect gouged the city's tax base and enticed those same workers to relocate their families to the suburbs to be closer to their jobs.

A particular difficulty though when studying economic factors surrounding the uprising is that history's traditional narrative suggests that the summer of 1967 opened the floodgates of white flight away from the city. Sugrue argues that an issue with how the auto industry is framed in relation to 1967 race relations is that the spotlight on Detroit's automotive dependence is not acknowledged until after the uprising. As he describes, this take on Detroit's relationship with the auto industry suggests that these companies were scared away after the uprising as a seemingly abrupt and reactionary measure. In truth, however, automotive companies and their manufacturing jobs were already leaving the city and, in some cases, Michigan altogether.¹⁰ When some plants relocated to cities like Dearborn, black workers were left unemployed with limited access to public transit to the new plants. This process continued for years, propelling the same white flight that reshaped the housing sector, leaving Detroit with distinct barriers of opportunity. By 1966, the rate of unemployed black Americans in Detroit was triple that of whites, leading Mayor Cavanagh to ask the federal government for \$10 billion in aid to combat poverty. The Senate Committee considered the request, but ultimately contributed funds to its model city program instead, the same program that reified the discriminatory restrictions in property ownership.¹¹ By the summer of 1967, the automotive companies had mostly left, taking with them white workers who could afford to relocate as well. In short, the Motor City had lost its motor as it was sapped of the robust tax revenue paid by the companies and their white workers. By the late 1950s, Detroit was poorer, blacker, and

emptier, with over 9.9 million square feet in factory or manufacturing space left rotted and abandoned.¹² The loss in employment opportunities left Detroit's black residents feeling hopeless and discouraged, feelings that were compounded by a waning education system and racist housing strategies. The three issues reinforced one another, rotting Detroit from within on almost exclusively racial grounds. This cycle of subjugation limited opportunities for black Detroiters and was only worsened by a vicious police force that regularly terrorized residents.

Police Relations

As economic, education, and housing problems escalated, the fuse to the powder keg of the 1967 uprising was police cruelty committed against black residents. Leading up to the 1960s, Detroit's police department was known for abusive practices and frequently humiliating acts against black men and women. In her comprehensive project on Detroit's summer of 1967, Fine declares that police-community relations were "the single most important problem" leading up to the uprising.¹³ But the Detroit Police Department's engrained bigotry and cruelty did not arise out of nowhere in 1967. Their history of mistreating black citizens goes as far back as the 1920s as desperate white citizens sought more effective means of keeping blacks from entering their neighborhoods.¹⁴ White anxieties toward the influx of black neighbors strengthened over time, and police responses to such fears only worsened with noted cases of unjust and unnecessary force against black residents. These incidents pushed black Detroiters to city spaces like Paradise Valley and the Black Bottom neighborhoods on Detroit's east side, away from whites and potential police threats. Along with the expansion of Detroit Police force and frequency of police misconduct, the Ku Klux Klan's presence became prominent with the nation's largest chapter stationed nearby.¹⁵ By the 1940s, almost everywhere black folks turned

in Detroit, anti-black sentiment met them in their workplaces and public lives. As black migrants expanded the workforce in the auto plants, the KKK also saw increased membership and activity in Detroit. For a city historically recognized for its black residency, it also holds a long association with the Klan as well. The Klan's influence stretched from public office to real estate practices with the proliferation of Klan-sponsored neighborhood associations. Moreover, the police force became the perfect tool for maintaining segregation across Detroit. Protected by the authority of their badges, police were free to enact whatever strategies they saw necessary to keep black progress at bay. As Detroit's black population expanded further, Klan militancy evolved into a sect known as The Black Legion. A radical extension of the Klan, The Black Legion was made up of white supremacists that regularly terrorized black folks in Detroit. The Legion was credited with murdering several black Americans during a twenty-year period that lasted until the 1940s. Their presence proved even more controversial as investigations by the *Detroit Free Press* and FBI revealed Wayne County Prosecutor Duncan McRea, Detroit's Police Chief, and scores of fellow officers affiliated with the Legion.¹⁶

The Detroit Police Department continued to build a brutal reputation leading as officers regularly attacked black citizens for seemingly minor or phony crimes. In July of 1940 on Belle Isle, police arrested and beat a black man, which led to a gathering of black protesters, most of whom were also arrested. The response by white witnesses in the press the next day was one of indignation, as many argued blacks had no business being in their park.¹⁷ In February 1942, two of the first black families scheduled to move into the Conant Gardens housing development were met by a large mob of angry whites. An equally large black mob also gathered to defend their neighbors, which brought police to the scene, who, to the shock of black protesters,

joined the mob and refused to apprehend white protesters.¹⁸ These incidents occurred in the context of similar discriminatory acts against different ethnic, religious, and racial groups, until an inevitable clash of groups came to a head in 1943.

On the evening of June 19, 1943, a group of young black men were walking through the Eastwood Amusement Park when a group of white men assaulted them just outside city limits. The following afternoon, the same group went to Belle Isle where they were involved in another fistfight that attracted many onlookers who went on to participate in the melee.¹⁹ The fighting spread to Gabriel Richard Park and thus ignited the Detroit Race Riot of 1943, a three-day period of looting, violence, and death. Over those three days, white mobs invaded, looted, and burned black businesses while black groups committed similar crimes against white-owned properties. Stories of people walking out of theaters only to be immediately attacked were common as images from that day depict individuals being dragged from busses or cars into waiting crowds of rioters.²⁰ By the time the violence ended on June 21, 34 people died, 433 had been injured, and an estimated \$2 million in damage left properties destroyed. Most unsettling, however, was most of the killing over the three day period was dealt by the hand of police officers. Of the 34 people killed during in the riots, 25 were black and of those, 17 lost their lives to officers, typically by gunshot wound to the back. Black Detroiters were regularly shot at by officers and, of the 1800 people arrested throughout the riot, 85 percent of them were black. During one incident on June 21, a police officer was allegedly shot in a parking lot, where the assailant was immediately gunned down next to an apartment building on 290 East Vernor Highway. Police then called in reinforcements, who set up a perimeter and shot at the building with machine guns, rifles, and handguns before eventually smoking the residents out with tear

gas.²¹ The apartment's residents eventually emerged from the chaos as they were searched, detained, and held at gunpoint while other officers ransacked the apartment complex. Residents would go on to report missing jewelry, belongings, and liquor, but no investigation was launched about the incident.

By the 1960s, Detroit's police-community relations were the center of most black citizens' discussions of injustice in their city. By 1967, resentment was mutually held by both black citizens and the police. In a field survey of the DPD, it was revealed that 45 percent of police working in black neighborhoods were "extremely anti-negro" and an additional 34 percent were "prejudiced."²² In another report on Detroit's black community in the early-1960s, nearly 80 percent compared their daily lives to "living in an occupied foreign country."²³ Sentiments of anxiety, fear, and humiliation followed Detroit's black residents as they went about their daily lives. In the years immediately preceding the uprising, the presence of "The Big Four" patrolling black neighborhoods left black residents to fearful of the very sight of police cruisers.²⁴ The Big Four were patrol units of four officers that would freely detain, assault, and humiliate black Detroiters on their daily walks to work or school. As a virtually unchecked source of abuse, The Big Four was another product of a decades-long system of ignored police misconduct in Detroit.

The Uprising

During the early hours of July 22, 1967, a large gathering of Detroit residents assembled in an office space above the Economy Printing Company at 9125 12th Street to celebrate the return of two local GIs from the Vietnam War.²⁵ Known as a blind pig, these informal after-hours drinking establishments served working and middle-class blacks in Detroit during a time

when their presence was barred or unwelcome in typical taverns. The space above the Economy Printing Company was well known by the Detroit police as a blind pig, having been raided nine times in the previous year, with 38 attendees arrested on two successful raids. But the night of July 23 brought a more crowded gathering, and officers were stunned to find over 80 people in the blind pig, far more than could fit in the paddy wagon they called in anticipation of the raid. The officers decided everyone in attendance would be arrested, but the crowd's size forced the situation to move outside into the open 12th Street where dozens of black residents looked on. Standing guard with the large group, officers waited for paddy wagons to arrive, but the delay allowed nearby residents to see what was going on. The crowd grew in size, and as frustration swelled, the group started heckling the officers. Minutes later, William Scott III was incensed at the sight of an officer dragging people downstairs. Scott shouted at the officers and to the crowd, "Are we going to let these peckerwood motherfuckers come down here any time they want and mess around?"²⁶ Scott then lobbed a glass bottle in the direction of the arrests, where it shattered at the officers' feet. As the final police cruiser sped away, the gathered crowd turned to smashing business windows and violently moving about 12th Street as the uprising erupted.

Over the course of five days, Detroit officials lost control of the city with civilians looting and burning buildings at a fervid pace. And while each day of the 1967 uprising is rife with traumatic and controversial events, several merit our attention to examine how they inform the city's larger civil rights identity and shape the city's present conditions. While dissenting residents during the uprising recall compelling stories of urban discord, they stand in stark difference to the manner in which the city frames these same events. As such, these divergent

retellings reflect the residential and institutional divide that has widened in the city since. Above all, the aftermath of the uprising illustrates a deep-seeded pain in Detroiters and their struggle against an engrained sense of subjugation that must not be dismissed in Detroit's campaign to renew.

On Sunday, July 23, 1967, the fires of the uprising spread as black citizens immediately began looting and burning buildings near the scene of arrests and, to complicate matters, made a concerted effort to block streets from incoming fire department responders. The blockades allowed many of the fires to spread and, before long, entire blocks were burning as Detroiters destroyed, looted and marched throughout. As police arrived on scene, confusion arose as to how they should respond and differentiate between looters and protestors. It was immediately clear that city police were ill equipped to handle the chaos. Instructed to not use force or teargas, police were ineffective in stopping swaths of looters. As day one of the uprising came to a close, 600 riot-related incidents were reported and the rioting had spread to white areas of the city. At 9:07 PM, alleged sniper fire was reported and a few hours later, Governor Romney finally called in the National Guard.²⁷ In a single day, over one thousand people were arrested and liquor sales were banned as several gas stations were closed.

By Monday, July 24, national guardsmen arrived to the city and during an early morning news conference; Governor Romney warned Detroit that, "fleeing felons are subject to being shot."²⁸ As police, state troopers, and national guardsmen took positions around the city, a fear spread that one or more snipers were firing at responders. By mid-day, the city's fire department was stretched so thin that entire streets were left to burn because they could not respond fast enough. As fires spread across the city, Mayor Cavanagh and Governor Romney

made several pleas to the President to send in the US Army. By day's end, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover declared, "They have lost all control in Detroit," and the Army's paratrooper division arrived on the scene. While destruction struck black and white businesses alike, white Detroiters took to the press to criticize black residents for destroying their own community. But to those participating in the rioting and looting, they were lashing out against the city itself where the supposed homes they had built were little more than spaces of outright isolation. In the *Detroit Free Press'* coverage, rioters argued that their actions were not just acts of violence, but an eruption of rebellion to dismantle of the city's stranglehold on black progress. As the country set its eyes on the raging conflict in Detroit, President Johnson held a conference on July 25th where he lamented, "law and order have broken down in Detroit."²⁹ The third day of rioting was marked by more reports of snipers firing at firefighters and more people being shot in the streets. The reports prompted a heightened response by federal officials at the Pentagon, and another 10,000 national guardsmen and paratroopers were sent in.³⁰ By day three of the uprising, officers were ordered to retreat from areas where resistance became too hostile.³¹

During the early hours of July 26th, 4-year-old Tonia Blanding was fearfully huddled in her parent's apartment as gunshots echoed in the night. The Blanding apartment was located near the corner of 12th Street and Euclid, a location regularly reported for allegations of sniper fire. A little after midnight, a National Guard tank crawled towards the corner of 12th and Euclid while troopers inside the armored vehicle kept watch of suspicious activity. Moments later, Tonia's uncle, Bill Hood struck a match to light his cigarette, catching the attention of an uneasy guard. The tank swiftly turned its sights on the window where the flash appeared and immediately fired several .50 caliber rounds into the apartment.³² To put the tank's .50 caliber

shells into perspective, at over 6-inches long and triple the size of a sidearm bullet, rounds of this size are manufactured to penetrate several feet of concrete, armored vehicles, or disable heavily fortified bunkers.³³ As rounds ripped through the apartment, one struck Tonia's aunt, Valerie Hood, nearly severing her arm from her body. While Hood's life was spared, Tonia was killed as several .50 caliber shells slammed into her chest, throwing her across the apartment.³⁴ Although the prospect of firing a .50 caliber round into a civilian space is outrageous to begin with, the reasoning behind the shots is equally egregious. At several points during the uprising, headlines of black snipers stoked fears in civilians and military personnel alike. Yet, follow-up investigations and federal inquiries like the commission led by Otto Kerner concluded that not a single sniper rifle was found, and evidence supporting the presence of snipers was erroneous in nature.³⁵ At 4-years-old, Blanding was the youngest person to die during the uprising.

Close to the same time when police were responding to Blanding's death, officers were called to an incident at the nearby Algiers Motel, where more reports of sniper fire caught the attention of officers Ronald August, Robert Paille, and David Senak. The shots in question rang from a starter pistol fired inside the motel by Carl Cooper, a black 17-year-old male staying in the motel with Aubrey Pollard, Fred Temple, Michael Clark, Lee Forsythe, and James Sortor. Also staying in the motel was veteran Robert Lee Green and two white women, Juli Hysell and Karen Malloy.³⁶ Police stormed the motel annex, immediately killing Cooper. After breaching the door, police aggressively interrogated the occupants, demanding to see a sniper rifle that never existed. The officers went on to humiliate, abuse, and taunt the occupants in a gross display of police misconduct. Eventually, the scare tactics escalated as Officers August, Paille, and Senak took turns bringing the men into motel rooms for a "death game," where rounds

fired into the ground would give off the impression that the person in question was executed. After Officer Senak asked August, "Want to shoot a nigger?" August took Pollard into room where the two were alone. Officer August was unaware that the game was meant to be a ruse and moments later, fired a shotgun point-black at Pollard. The Detroit police officers lost control of the night as national guardsmen and state police vacated the scene.³⁷ In a mere thirty minutes from police smashing down the annex door to the incident being reported to the station, Cooper, Pollard, and Temple were killed.³⁸ During searches of the scene, police found knives near the bodies of the deceased, which were used as the catalysts of what the officers claimed was self-defense. In a trial the next year, several witnesses testified that the officers executed the men and planted the weapons as evidence. None of the three officers were convicted of their murder charges.

The Aftermath

In the fifty years since the fires of 1967 faded, city officials have largely avoided the debate on how the uprising's legacy should be remembered. Immediately after the uprising, President Johnson ordered an in-depth analysis of what happened in Detroit and other cities during the Long Hot Summer. Led by Illinois Governor Otto Kerner, the commission released *The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* in 1968, commonly known as "*The Kerner Report*." The Report's findings were comprehensive and disturbing, spotlighting race relations in urban America. The report condemned a number of the factors that lead up to the uprising, notably police brutality and unjust economic, education, employment, and housing conditions.³⁹ The Kerner Report made a series of recommendations as well, like comprehensive housing reform and legislation to correct the Jim Crow policies that plagued

cities like Detroit. Most poignantly though, the report warned the rest of the country: “The nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white-separate and unequal.”⁴⁰ Later on, the report turned a more direct focus to Detroit, cautioning that unless sweeping changes were passed, “a system of apartheid” would begin to spread in American cities like Detroit.⁴¹ With Detroit as the report’s formative case study, the city’s response in the aftermath of 1967’s civil unrest speaks to a neglect and disregard of the report’s findings.

Immediately after the uprising, many of Detroit’s residents fixed their attention on police injustices committed throughout the five-day struggle, namely the death of Tonia Blanding and the atrocity at the Algiers. Prior to the murder trials for Officers August, Paille, and Senak, the community held its own People’s Tribunal, which included comprehensive investigation and testimonies from witnesses to the incident. The tribunal took place August 30, 1967, with figures like Rosa Parks and Representative John Conyers in audience with more than two thousand residents.⁴² In a trial carried out by the people, the tribunal included black and white jurors who found all three officers guilty of murder charges. But the federal trial played out differently. After a series of postponements and delays, Detroit officials moved the trial to nearby Mason, a town that at the time boasted a 99 percent white population.⁴³ The three officers were acquitted of all charges and Officers August and Senak were reinstated to the Detroit Police Department three years later. Following the ruling, then-senator Coleman Young declared, “This latest phase of step-by-step whitewash of a police slaying demonstrates once again that law and order is a one-way street; there is no law and order where black people are involved, especially when they are involved with the police.”⁴⁴ As the trials were underway, City Prosecutor William Cahalan declared the Algiers site a public nuisance, ordering the motel to be

padlocked. The building was briefly reused as “The Desert Inn,” but in 1979 was torn down by city officials after seizing the property.⁴⁵ No material remains of the Algiers Motel Incident exist today, and the space where the motel once stood is now a public park.

Following the Algiers trials, it was clear that the unchecked power of Detroit’s police would never see balance unless aggressive measures were taken on a legislative level. Coleman Young’s words after the trial spoke to the experience of black residents across Detroit who, in 1974, united to elect Young as the city’s first black mayor. Young wasted no time and upon entering office, addressed the city’s police relations head-on. As one of his campaign promises and first actions as Mayor, Young disbanded the STRESS (Stop the Robberies and Enjoy Safe Streets) program. A unit within DPD, STRESS notoriously targeted black citizens and exercised excessive violence in the years following the uprising.⁴⁶ Young continued to actively integrate the city’s police force, a successful effort that steadily rebuilt public trust in its police. In the years immediately following Young’s election, political power in Detroit swung to the hands of its black community, but economic control still sat in the firm grip of white figures. To stimulate growth in the city, Young fixed his attention to the site of the riots origin to launch a redevelopment program.

By 1976, what was once 12th Street from a decade earlier was now a long stretch of abandoned buildings, broken down homes, and expanses of undesirable land. The Young administration took this opportunity to redevelop the space with black residents in mind, slowly acquiring properties with visions of housing developments, a shopping center, and a park.⁴⁷ Prior to the uprising, 12th Street was a center of activity with a vibrant nightlife to go along with several businesses along the road. In 1976, to give the street the fresh start it

needed, the city dedicated 12th Street to civil rights heroine and Detroit resident Rosa Parks. Parks was in attendance for the ceremony as 12th Street was renamed in her honor and a vision for the future of Rosa Parks Boulevard was described for the public.⁴⁸ While initial changes brought additions like a shopping center and housing complex, the vision for Rosa Parks Boulevard fell short of becoming a hub for the black community it once hosted. Historian Joel Stone writes, “When you talk to the people who lived there, their response is, ‘Why didn’t anybody come in and fix this? Why didn’t they come in to rebuild our homes? Why didn’t they help the businesses rebuild?’ They kind of abandoned us and left.”⁴⁹ Initially billed as an incoming restoration for the space, what was once 12th Street was stripped of its community function and wiped of its identity.

The feeling of resentment Stone notes was a common one among Detroiters in their reflections on the fifty years after the uprising. For some, the accomplishments of the Young administration from 1974-1994 improved police-community relations and strengthen the value of black voices in a city where such residents were repressed for decades. For others, the five decades between the rebellion and today represent failed opportunities and a concerted neglect toward black residents. “The irony is that today working class poor black people in Detroit are worse off than they were in 1967,” argues Shelia Crockel, a 20-year old activist during the uprising.⁵⁰ For residents like Crockel, while police-community relations improved, the aftermath of businesses and communities vacating the city crippled Detroit. Moreover, the manner in which 1967 is discussed remains problematic on a semantic and mnemonic level. Those who simplify the uprising as a riot divorce the 1967 uprising from its complicated cultural and historical contexts.⁵¹ The riot versus rebellion debate rests on contested memories of the

events divided along racial lines. Along with the rhetorical tensions in naming 1967, Detroiters lament the city's efforts to avoid or ignore their own responsibility toward the uprising. Many criticize the city for waiting fifty years to commemorate the events of 1967 and publicly acknowledge its origins, some going so far as to accuse the city of exploiting the anniversary for political gain during its twenty-first century redevelopment.⁵² None can deny, however, that the summer of 1967 etched the city with a number of cultural, economic, political, and social markings that transformed Detroit for years to come. A decades-long evasion from the legacy of 1967, any grounds of responsibility, and the need for reconciliation has left residents skeptical of city leadership. And as Detroit rapidly transforms around them, these residents long for the wounds of 1967 to finally close as the city they fought to call home seemingly moves on without them.

Rhetorical Productions of Amnesia

As five decades have passed since the uprising scorched the city, I wish to consider not just how the memories of 1967 play a role in the city's ongoing redevelopment, but how they are bound to the very space that was once 12th Street. Put differently, the remainder of this chapter analyzes how memories of the uprising are rhetorically anchored to the space of 12th Street and how those rhetorical traces drive cultural visions of Detroit. Now that Detroit is situated in an ongoing effort to rebuild, renew, and revive, I posed three central inquiries related to the way memories of 1967 are applied as a cultural guide for the city's future. First, I question how the absence of the uprising's key sites informs how the episode is remembered. Second, I inquire into how the episode is named or labeled and how this frames our public assumptions of 1967. Finally, I consider how symptoms of public forgetting and amnesia

emerge from these mnemonic rhetorics, and how their presence impacts Detroit ability to reconcile its past in light of its renewal. In all, rhetorical frameworks of absence, identification, and forgetting bind the legacy of 1967 to Detroit's material space, informing our associations of the city.

Absence & Presence

Features of absence and presence are essential in assigning meaning to public spaces, particularly in terms of commemorating or in some cases ignoring fragments of an event. In sites of commemoration or memorials for example, that which is absent or omitted is equally, if not more important, than the features that are displayed.⁵³ The absence of material features invites a particular reading of 12th Street's spatial meaning, as key sites throughout the space shape public associations between the street and its legacy.⁵⁴ To disassemble the role of absence and presence as they relate to the rhetorical construction of material spaces, I begin by identifying salient locations such as the absent Algiers Motel and the presence of Gordon Park as formative artifacts that rhetorically shape 12th Street.

As the smoke dissipated on the uprising in August 1967, the people of Detroit turned their sights to the horrors of the Algiers and took part in the People's Tribunal.⁵⁵ While the tribunal was an unofficial public body, the fervor it generated as testimonies shook the public showed the anger grounded in Detroiters toward the aftermath of the Algiers. "To examine the 1967 rebellion without speaking about the Algiers Motel would be really remiss to any true history of what occurred," Charles Ferrell argues.⁵⁶ Thus, as Detroiters prepared to wrangle with the consequences of the uprising, the Algiers case and the space in which it occurred were of particular import for residents. But the motel was torn down in 1979 and the space in which

it once stood is now a public park. The loss of the site's material presence erased the singular referent for Detroiters to turn to and reflect on its fallout. One consequence that emerged due to the motel's demolition was a loss of its associated memory as people attempt to recall the 1967 uprising. Popular narratives of 1967 typically discuss street violence or rioting, but fail to note the significance of what happened at the Algiers.⁵⁷ As such, the absence of the Algiers Motel diminishes our recollection of the broader context that led to the uprising. Moreover, the site's absence and the event's general omission from traditional narrations about the uprising advance a singular reading of 1967 that overlooks the nuance of unresolved cultural tension that the dismissed Algiers crimes reveal.

The hurried efforts to close, rename, and ultimately demolish the Algiers Motel were curious maneuvers given the controversial nature of the site. As the setting for three unjust police killings during the uprising, the motel's significance climbed as public outcry for justice increased. Tearing down a site that represents the apex of police brutality during the uprising suggested what leaders envisioned for the uprising's legacy in terms of retaining the site of contentious memory. In a way, the Algiers' demolition is one of many maneuvers by city officials to institute sweeping changes to forcibly erase the past and move the city forward rather than reflect on the painful emotions and causes of the violence. However, in the aftermath of the officers' acquittals, the destruction of the site impeded public reconciliation since justice was not achieved and the rulings brought about similar feelings of legislative futility and racial inequity. The absence of the Algiers Motel rhetorically haunts progress for both 12th Street and Detroit, laying a specter of unsettled injustice on the city.⁵⁸ While the

existence of the Algiers Motel may be materially absent from the landscape of 12th Street, an unresolved discontent remained, only to be neglected for decades to follow.

Yet, despite the physical erasure of the Algiers Motel, the events that happened in the space would later return as the focus of *Detroit*, the 2017 feature film released days after the uprising's 50th anniversary that revisited this unsettled legacy and its implications for Detroit's ongoing transformation in public discourse. Released on July 28, 2017, Kathryn Bigelow's *Detroit* invites audiences to bear witness to a dramatic retelling of the injustice surrounding the Algiers Motel Incident. With a release date on the 50th anniversary of the uprising's close, the film returns both Detroit and American audiences to an injustice that was never properly resolved. Moreover, widespread reaction to the film found its tale eerily like the recent spate of violence against black people that led to the development of the Black Lives Matter movement.⁵⁹ *Detroit*, as a vehicle for public memory about the Algiers Motel and the 1967 uprising, functions as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the film asks Americans to reconsider a historical injustice many had never heard of until viewing the film. As Bigelow suggests, "This story, this tragedy, this atrocity, the executions of these young men—[as a result of the film,] their deaths are no longer a secret."⁶⁰ Despite its shortcomings, *Detroit* details a rarely discussed but highly controversial moment during the uprising that demands that we ask how this event has been removed from our collective memory and why its legacy has been ignored.

This is not to say, however, that the film is flawless and completely accurate; many critics argued that the film reinforced a simplified version of the uprising often included in popular narratives about the civil rights movement. For example, historian Jeanne Theoharris

declared the film “...irresponsible and dangerous” because of its selective inclusion of details about the uprising.⁶¹ From the outset, the film opens with a city in discord, devoid of any contextual evidence of black activism prior to the rebellion or any sense of community amongst black Detroiters. The film’s illustration of the rebellion’s roots never extends beyond police misconduct, therein negating the complicated institutional struggles that drove the conflict. As Theoharris points out, “People had reached their breaking point. But the movie doesn’t offer any of this. Bigelow’s Detroiters are angry, alienated, unthinking and apolitical.”⁶² The film warps public understandings of Detroit and 1967 during this critical juncture for the city.

Writing for *The Huffington Post*, Theoharris further laments:

Though heralded for its ‘research’, the film distorts and obscures the story of 1960s Detroit, the events at the Algiers Motel, and black life in the city more broadly. In Bigelow and Boal’s Detroit, there is no black activism before the uprising. Yet in actual Detroit, there was a longstanding civil rights movement in the city focusing on housing and school segregation, job exclusion, and police brutality.⁶³

Later in her critique, Theoharris argues Bigelow’s film exploits the recent 50th anniversary of 1967 and Detroit’s redevelopment. While Theoharris’ criticisms are fair, the larger problem is that no film can substitute for the material markers that should circulate memories about the causes and events of the 1967 uprising. At best, popular accounts of the incident recall little more than a slice of the deeper struggles behind the uprising and, more broadly, for civil rights. As a result, it operates as a rhetoric of absence that focuses on select portions of a complicated historic event while omitting the rest. For more than fifty years, this complicated context has been forgotten and omitted to erase the past and forget what happened.

Along with the rhetorical absence about the Algiers Motel, Detroit’s Gordon Park is related location bound to the uprising and influential in our recollection of its legacy.

Specifically, the park is located at the very spot where Bill Scott stepped forward to launch the bottle on the night of July 23, 1967 that started the five-day event. Gordon Park is an interesting space to encounter because of its subdued and passive aesthetic as a public park. This contrasts sharply with pre-uprising 12th Street, which served as a hub for black residents. Thus, the present park is a rhetoric of absence, as it erased the physical and cultural significance of the space. But perhaps most curious aspect of Gordon Park is a modern, polyhedron statue situated at the exact site of the blind pig where the uprising began. Built by Jack Ward in 1975, the statue bears no outright artistic or official association to the uprising. Curiously, Ward has since denied that the piece serves as a memorial or commemoration of any kind, making its presence a peculiar addition, as it rhetorically erases and distracts from the significance of the space.⁶⁴

Although some residents enjoy Gordon Park's presence, some see the park and adjacent changes to 12th Street as a rhetorical and material punishment for those who rebelled in 1967 by stripping the space of its communal and mnemonic functions. For instance, Detroitier Lamont Causey states, "A lot of folks try to hide the stigma about what happened. Look around you, see the consequences, do you see any businesses? All you see is a bunch of raggedy houses waiting and hoping to get redeveloped. That's what we've been waiting on for 50 years."⁶⁵ Causey's criticisms are noteworthy, as 12th Street was to be redeveloped in the early years of the Young administration, but those projects never materialized.

On its surface, Gordon Park seems like a benign development in terms of its associations to Detroit's memories of the civil rights struggle. However, like the emptiness left behind in the wake of the Algiers Motel's demolition, Gordon Park is rhetorically significant due to the spatial

absences generated in its creation. In many ways, Gordon Park's existence is predicated on the physical erasure of a predominantly black space that forecloses any opportunity for black communities to cultivate businesses or social centers following the uprising. Rather than invest resources to allow black communities to once again thrive in this space, Gordon Park's installation eradicated possibilities by removing any commercial and residential value entirely. Moreover, the park annihilates a material relic related to the uprising without any effort to reconcile the resentment formed in the aftermath of 1967. The erasure of this space not only occurs on a material level through foreclosed businesses, community spaces, and gathering places, but on a symbolic and mnemonic plane as well. By limiting the opportunity for the Detroit community to resolve the causes and effects of the uprising, the revolt is simply remembered as matter of excessive police violence, rather than a broader issue of discriminatory education, economic, and political practices. According to Vivian, this failure to resolve memories about collective trauma breeds resentment and a host of future problems.⁶⁶ With the construction of Gordon Park, officials not only destroyed a space that could possibility act as a place for reflection on the discontent and resentment that resulted in the wake of 1967, but they also purged 12th Street's name from the space. While demolishing buildings and designing apolitical and largely empty parks operates as a discourse of absence and erasure, the renaming of 12th Street sought to distract recollection of the past by associating the site with a beloved civil rights icon: Rosa Parks.

Naming & Identification

Our ability to remember significant events or figures from our past is bound to basic symbols, such as their label or name. Kenneth Burke argues that naming is a powerful symbolic

maneuver, as the act of naming redirects “the attention into some channels rather than others.”⁶⁷ Raymie McKerrow similarly notes the power of naming, arguing that the act constitutes identities and allows symbols to possess power. As a result, naming is the “central symbolic act of nominalist rhetorics.”⁶⁸ This symbolic action, which articulates power and directs public attention, shapes and directs tense racial and political sentiment. As a result, it is best to view the renaming of 12th Street in honor of Rosa Parks not as a simple act of rebranding to give a neighborhood a new start; rather, it should be understood as an act of power that has significant implications on the rhetorical framing of public memories of 1967.

Given Parks’ reverence in the Detroit community, the move to rename 12th Street as Rosa Parks Boulevard came with little opposition. Since her move to Detroit in the late 1950s, Parks was an active member in the Detroit community. When Coleman Young chose to dedicate 12th Street in Parks’ honor, Detroiters celebrated the move. At the time, a series of shops were in development, along with public parks, and a supermarket that would attract regular traffic from residents. For the city, renaming the street served an additional purpose related to a dealing with the larger legacy of the 1967 uprising: an attempt to redirect attention to move forward. Using the site of the uprising’s origin and rebranding its nominal association to a civil rights icon, the maneuver ostensibly displaces attention away from what happened at the location in 1967 and instead to focus on iconic figures like Parks. The street’s renaming was not unprecedented either, with a rising trend of mnemonic dedications to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Thurgood Marshall in public spaces increased.⁶⁹ For the space’s associations as a whole, however, the switch redirected attention from 12th Street’s association as a space of civil rights conflict to that of a celebration of Parks’ civil rights legacy.

The implications of street naming may seem mundane on the surface, but these sites are visited and discussed on a daily basis and they function as principle arteries of urban movement, where those names we attach to them carry meaning. Melvin Dixon argues, “Not only do these street names celebrate and commemorate great figures in black culture, they provoke our active participation in that history. What was important yesterday becomes a landmark today.”⁷⁰ That provocation may have been intentional for Mayor Coleman Young, but it invites us to ask: what version of history are people being directed to participate in? As consequences of absence and presence already altered 12th Street’s functionality in the time since the uprising, inviting residents to reflect on the historical significance of a site already cleansed of its material and rhetorical meaning is difficult at best. Due to this lack of material presence, residents only have the name of the location to remember what occurred there. Thus, the act of renaming 12th Street has significant ramifications for public remembrance of the causes and events that led to and transpired in 1967.

By associating Rosa Parks with the empty site of the uprising, officials sanitize the setting from immediate associations to its violent legacy. Even if residents make deliberate efforts to recollect and discuss the events of 1967, the rhetorical and material sources of remembrance have been erased and renamed, directing discussions away from the causes and effects of the event. Coupling this act of erasure with the municipal seizure and reassignment of various spaces along what is now Rosa Parks Boulevard, opportunities for Detroit residents to remember the origins of the uprising are restricted, if not largely foreclosed. In time, the name and more importantly, the memory, of 12th Street fades from public consciousness as residents cultivate a new way of remembering the city. This is not to say that Detroiters entirely forget

the events of 1967 by simply renaming a street. However, an important element in recollection and the formation of vernacular counter-memories is regular recall.⁷¹ When residents lose basic associative means to look back on the 1967 uprising, like named locations, these memories are less likely to persist.

Yet, for some people, an opportunity to move forward was a welcome change from what they perceived as the bitterness connected with 1967. For example, for William Scott, the man who launched the first bottle at police in 1967, the legacy of 1967 haunts both him and the city. As Scott discussed his experience walking the streets after the uprising, “The further I walked down Twelfth, the more I became aware of the destruction, which made me feel less of a man for being part of it.”⁷² For residents like Scott, the shame, guilt, and trauma associated with the uprising outweighed their desire to continually host a relic of the riots as a part of their daily lives. In a way, renaming 12th Street promotes psychological closure for some residents like Scott. However, what is the rhetorical cost of this closure? Sentiments like those held by Scott are contrasted by residents like Lamont Causey, who decries attempts to turn away from efforts to remember and reconcile in a time where the city seems to turn its back on its own legacy. Thus, despite the setting of the uprising being renamed to sanitize and control remembrance of the rebellion, its unsettled and disconcerting legacy remains.

As new rhetorical and spatial associations with 12th Street emerge, they divert attention away from resolving a crucial event in Detroit’s past that not only altered the course of residents’ lives, but the city itself. Once these spaces are foreclosed and have their meanings revised, distorted visions of the origins and consequences of 1967 spread. For instance, Bill McGraw, a Detroit news reporter, contends that the attempt to encourage residents to move

forward without proper remembrance and reconciliation “sells short the built up anger and long standing resentment over police brutality, institutional discrimination, and social injustice.”⁷³ Similarly, exhibits at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History contend that the 50th anniversary of the event provides an opportunity for the city to look back on this crucial episode and recognize the multitude of unaddressed problems that drove the rebellion and continues to haunt the city.

This effort to critically remember must start with an understanding of how we label the rebellion. Charles Farrell, the Wright Museum’s vice president, argues, “The word ‘riot’ denotes that people are criminals and it takes away from the political responsibility of addressing certain underlying conditions that cause people to respond.”⁷⁴ But depending on whose version of 1967 is being called forth; the episode’s label brings about completely different associations. As one Detroiter explains, “you and I could be standing right here next to each other, and our interpretation of the events could be different. The bottom line is that it happened.”⁷⁵ As we consider how residents and others recollect 1967, one of the most contentious issues is whether the conflict was called a riot or a rebellion. The choice in the label is important because it established a rhetorical framework of understanding the events of 1967 that affect people’s ability to reach the reconciliation necessary for them to move forward.

Whether the event is called a riot or rebellion operates as a rhetorical frame or perspective that focuses or redirects attention away from causes, responsible agents, and effects of the situation, according to Burke’s understanding of the symbolic act of naming.⁷⁶ Beyond its ability to direct our focus, the act of naming the 1967 event a riot, rebellion, or uprising is racially coded as well. For a country whose genesis is grounded in successful

resistance against oppression, the way we associate public action of political and social rebellion is fraught with political and rhetorical implications. Put differently, the American public is more likely to display a sense of collective empathy to those events deemed as a rebellion, which are usually framed in contexts of officially sanctioned liberation or struggles for freedom, usually in other nations.⁷⁷ Or, acts of resistance by largely white populations, even if heavily armed, are considered peaceful and Constitutionally-protected acts of protest. However, riots are racially coded as dangerous disturbances of the peace caused by non-white people. Typically, the label “riot” articulates together mindless destructive acts with black bodies. In a recent article on Ferguson and Black Lives Matter, Jack Schneider wrote:

If whites are involved, uprisings tend to be framed as rebellions. Flip through the index of any social studies text, and you'll find several of them: Bacon's Rebellion, Shay's Rebellion, Dorr's Rebellion. The list goes on. [But] When blacks are involved, however, an uprising isn't a rebellion; it's a riot. Harlem, Watts, Chicago. Or, more recently, Ferguson.”⁷⁸

When considering the summer of 1967, no one argues about whether rioting occurred; it certainly did. Looting, rioting, and other forms of disorder filled the streets of Detroit during the summer of 1967. However, the uprising was more than a simple act of violence; once named a “riot,” the event of 1965 Watts, 1967 Detroit, or 2014 Ferguson, are viewed through the racial lens of violence, irrationality, and chaos. When we label the uprisings of 1967 as a riot, not only do we rhetorically minimize the political nature of its origin, we stain the memory of the events as an attack on community, property, and America, which largely displaces the role of white supremacy in our collective memory.

To some, the naming of Rosa Parks Boulevard and the labels used to describe the events of 1967 may seem unrelated as one is a marker of space while the other assigns

blame or praise for events framed as either politically or violently motivated. Nevertheless, for Detroit's effort to collectively make sense of 1967, street and event names directly inform how these events are remembered and, thus, their lasting impact on the city. By reassigning 12th Street to the legacy of Rosa Parks, the city guides attention away from the complicated causes of the uprising and, instead, urges that Detroit move forward with the fonder memories of civil rights heroism. Similarly, the discursive frame created by the riot label attributes blame to reckless black individuals to minimize fault with broader system of economic and racial inequality that sparked the uprising. As these twin acts of naming work together to minimize and displace blame and rearticulate what we remember about the civil rights struggle, we are left with conflicted understandings of the cause and consequences of 1967. To be clear, I am not suggesting that the uprising has been lost in the minds of Detroiters; rather, I argue that these acts of public forgetting leave the city in a state of incomplete reconciliation, where 1967's legacy is unresolved as Detroit yearns for its closure.

Beginning Again: Public Forgetting and Reconciliation

On Sunday, July 20, 2017, the city revealed an official historic marker for the events of 1967, positioned in Gordon Park where the rebellion began fifty years earlier. For residents, the landmark's dedication is an official acknowledgement that the summer of 1967 is worth commemorating. The dedication ceremony was a modest affair, with around 300 Detroit residents in attendance as Representative John Conyers unveiled the marker.⁷⁹ The large green placard has an inscription on both sides, listing facts about the events of 1967. For example, it explains that 43 people died, "including bystanders, looters, a fireman, and national guardsman." Sadly, it fails to acknowledge the tragic and unjust deaths of people like Tonia

Blanding, Carl Cooper, Aubrey Pollard, or Fred Temple.⁸⁰ The marker fittingly notes the creation of the Kerner Commission and, despite a simplification of sorts, lists the origin as a response to “the frustrations of powerlessness.”⁸¹ Of particular note, the marker does not use the terms “riot” or “rebellion” at any point in its summary, referring to the event only as “civil unrest.”⁸² In all, the marker notes that the events of the uprising happened, but leaves audiences to ruminate on what comprised those frustrations and what were the specific sources and consequences on the unrest.

The recently dedicated historical marker and a concert of public events in the wake of the uprising’s 50th anniversary are important for Detroit’s effort to reconsider the uprising’s legacy and recognize its role in the city’s future. Despite the marker’s presence, most of the material and symbolic vestiges from 1967 have been all but eradicated. Not only did the city lose the Algiers Motel and several businesses and community places along 12th Street, the city lost most of its residents. Detroit’s population at the time of the uprising was estimated near 1.6 million. However, after the unrest, the total now hovers near 700,000. Although the decline and relocation of automotive manufacturing from Detroit prior to 1967 caused a lot of this exodus, a majority of those who remember the uprising simply left.⁸³ The loss of so many people is a significant obstacle in the effort to retain memories of 1967, particularly when the material sites of the events no longer exist. Over time, the absence of people and locations that can testify to the complicated history of 1967 leads to a public forgetting. While residents have certainly not forgotten that the events of 1967 ever happened, the loss of these memories through discourses of absence and naming encourage a narrowed understanding of the uprising.

But forgetting, as it relates to the legacy of the uprising, is not altogether troubling for Detroit as it looks to rise to prominence once more. While the public forgetting produced through rhetorical strategy of renaming and absence and gradual decay are problematic, forgetting in a critical sense of the word, as the result of critical remembrance and reconciliation, is important. To this point, I have illustrated how the loss of these sites is particularly important because the mnemonic void they leave behind also imparts an unsettled sorrow with it. Since the uprising, Detroiters have been pushed ahead hurriedly from the painful memories with incomplete responses like the Gordon Park marker or the film *Detroit*.

Public forgetting operates along two divergent paths. One route is seen in the status quo, an active effort to disregard and refuse to reflect on the past, where lost memory sites yield forgotten memories, unresolved pains, and resentment.⁸⁴ The other path, one that has yet to be fully taken, seeks to actively remember to constructive forget the pain associated with the event to mend the social wounds of neglect and move Detroit forward. Thus, forgetting is a construct that can either divide or unify Detroiters in their effort to reconcile the memories of the uprising and move their city forward to its promising future. Today, the importance of starting anew is a catchy theme that excites many Detroiters and those looking to be part of the city's return. But prospects of advancing must not be tied to an erasure of the past and the promise of a modernized city. To move forward means to also look back on a past that brought the city to rock bottom, its role in that past, and an overlooked period of rebellion that has yet to see the resolution it deserves. While many suggest that moving forward in Detroit means a move toward new commercial enterprises or attractive investments, I argue that the more important measure for Detroit to move forward is a step toward the uprising's reconciliation.

When we think about forgetting, we often associate it as an inevitable or destructive result, where the mind gradually decays and memories are lost altogether. However, public memory scholar Bradford Vivian tells us how productions of memory and forgetting “hold a cyclical relationship, where the presence of one necessitates the existence of the other.”⁸⁵ When scholars identify the presence of public memory, such as memories of the uprising, we must equally recognize the role forgetting holds in these accounts as well. Public memory scholarship highlight the relationship forgetting possesses as groups work to move forward after prolonged struggles, like we see with Detroit.⁸⁶ Collective efforts to move forward from traumatic conflicts or controversies to unify or at least live in peace is a function of forgetting noted in previous scholarship that similarly appeals to Detroit’s journey to reconciliation with the summer of 1967.

Unfortunately, public officials often response to controversy and conflict call for unresolved unity to respond to a larger threat. For example, when societies experience terrorist attacks or endure a national tragedy, officials will fall for unification at the expense of remembering deep divisions born from societal conflicts. In criticizing these efforts, Vivian characterizes this logic of forgetting in order to unify in noting: “Only by forgetting the past as it once was will humanity achieve enlightenment as it should be.”⁸⁷ In other words, for Detroit officials, the unresolved resentment present after 1967 paled in comparison to the importance of responding to economic crisis and moving the city forward economically. In this sense of forgetting the past entirely, the efforts to materially and rhetorically erase the presence of 1967 and calls to move on allegedly had productive outcomes in the minds of Detroit officials. But

these changes were in vain, as Detroit fell into bankruptcy and economic and racial inequalities remained largely unaddressed.

The deliberate efforts to forget or suppress memories about 1967 simplify the uprising by focusing on individual violent rioting or remembering distorted images of civil rights icons operate as a form of what I call public amnesia. This collective loss of memory is the product of rhetorical acts that selects and discards parts of the past. As Vivian argues, “Every history implicitly or explicitly argues that the public should remember some elements of the past and forget others, all the while supplying the idiom with which they do so. Every history labors to create its own epistemology—its own truth.”⁸⁸ Detroit promoted a version of its past where the salience of the causes of 1967 were diminished to a footnote in the city’s past, thereby moving the public forward by viewing 1967 as a violent aberration that warrants no further discussion. With the election of Coleman Young and a bevy of urban development projects, the Motor City became a city that seemingly progressed by addressing systemic neglect of black residents and the tyranny of police brutality.

By the 50th anniversary of the 1967 uprising, the national spotlight was on Detroit and there was an opportunity to reflect on the diverse causes of civil unrest. Many observers noted the similarities between the Detroit of today to that of fifty years earlier. For instance, during the dedication of the Detroit July 1967 historic marker, Mayor Mike Duggan engaged this topic, noting the improved race relations in the city, specifically the celebrated changes to the police department.⁸⁹ But the conditions that propelled the uprising were not solely the byproduct of police relations, but a network of interconnected discriminatory institutions and problems.⁹⁰ However, public amnesia makes us forget that it was one of 159 other instances of civil unrest

in urban areas during the long hot summer. By fixing Detroit and a limited range of causes as the focus of 1967, public memory of the larger context of America in 1967 forecloses discussion of the complicated problems that existed in these cities and the fact that many cities suffered much like Detroit.

The marker is one of several examples during the 50th anniversary that reignited public discourse about 1967. Along with the marker, Joel Stone's *Detroit 1967* collection was released and the Detroit Historic Society completed its multi-year "Detroit '67" project, which included vivid oral histories and first-hand accounts from residents during that summer. Further, the film *Detroit* was released, bringing attention to the overlooked and ignored events of the uprising. "I had never heard of the Algiers before this," said director Kathryn Bigelow. For Bigelow and many Americans, public forgetting of the Algiers incident occurred after the acquittal of the officers involved in the incident and the demolition of the Algiers Motel. While the film has generated mixed reviews, *Detroit* connects some of the urban struggles of the past to those of the present. Although a majority of the dialogue surrounding the movie connects the story to contemporary struggles with police brutality, it also serves a mnemonic role by reviving some discussion of a complicated historical episode very much in need of reconciliation.

Despite how much has been forgotten due to public amnesia, discussions about the 50th anniversary and debates about the nature of Detroit's current development have revived public dialogue about the legacy of 1967. As the consequences of downtown and Midtown developments highlight unresolved issues that lead to the 1967 uprising. As the summer of 1967, its origins, and its longstanding implications returned to focus in 2017 during a time when

Detroit was in transition, a moment to reconcile the lingering problems and resentment from the past opened once more.

While the prospect of reconciling the uprising's legacy to move the city onward may stoke skepticism in Detroiters, they must first accept the importance of forgetting as a precursor to progress. Vivian writes how commitments to critical forgetting operated as historical antecedent during some of the most significant moments that shaped America, as far back as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, an exploration of the productive potential of forgetting old customs or conflicts to beginning new endeavors.⁹¹ He adds that notions of remembering and forgetting in relation to history are often misunderstood because people conflate forgetting with the process of erasure or purging. But acts of remembering and forgetting from a critical perspective do not mean to literally erase these moments from our minds; instead, they are acts of revisiting the past to create an account of events that allows people to understand how the problems of the past occurred and reoccur over time. The difference can be best understood as a forgetting as convenient neglect compared to a forgetting as compassionate closure. To have any success in redeveloping and providing services to all residents, understanding the uprising's impression as a permanent mark on the city that cannot be forgotten is important.

Until Detroit can turn to its past and approach the uprising's legacy in a sincere move to peel away the barriers obscuring its memory, resentment and racial disharmony will continue to infect its future. Time will tell as to how incumbent figures piloting the city's future will make use of those resurfaced memories from the uprising's anniversary. While the 50th anniversary brought renewed public focus to some of the issues surrounding remembrance of the period of

unrest, this attention is insufficient to counter the decades of discourse of absent and naming that have minimized and displaced memories of the past. Detroit cannot run away from the echoes of its own past, especially one as significant to the status of the city as the summer of 1967. Therefore, the history of and rhetoric surrounding spaces like 12th Street are important to explore.

Detroit: Unsettled Grounds

In a time when Detroit's revitalization forges ahead, the consequences of 1967 and the city's experience during the 50th anniversary mark continue to remind the city that it has failed to truly understand and reconcile its past. Over five decades, the city and its residents have missed opportunities to examine 1967 for critical closure. Instead, the tendency, as seen with the treatment of the Algiers Motel and 12th Street, is to erase and move on. In 2013, the city experienced bankruptcy and, in the short time since, parts of Detroit have been impressively rebuilt in a campaign to reimagine Detroit. But this same upswing in productivity and optimism leads its own residents to look back on what brought Detroit to the position it holds today. Chief among these reflections was the 50th anniversary of the 1967 uprising, where media coverage, museum exhibits, and popular films forced residents to remember and reconsider the past. That return was anxious for some residents and painful for others, as the recollection required examining unsettled tensions and lingering problems. Perhaps more disturbing was that even a casual reflection on the events of 1967 reveals that the socio-political deficiencies that led to the uprising in 1967 appear to remain throughout the city. As a result, the foundations for the new Detroit are unstable as the same problems and issues that

fueled unrest fifty years ago continue today, and the memories of such conflicts continue to distress its people.

Twelfth Street's connections to Detroit's past and future not only illustrate how important urban sites filled with moments of trauma and history has powerful influence in shaping public memory. Much like the mnemonic discourses found at the Ossian Sweet House or the 8 Mile wall, 12th Street is a site of material memory perpetually marking Detroit with its own painful memories. In the opening of this chapter, I posed three questions that guided my examination of the mnemonic rhetoric of 12th Street and the uprising's legacy. I first asked how discourses of absence and presence played a role in shaping the memories of the 1967 uprising. My analysis reveals that when we approach the legacy of the 1967 uprising, the absence of central places of conflict constitutes a distorted vision of the uprising for the city. With the Algiers Motel, for instance, the building's demolition diminishes any effort to use the site as a point of reflection or reconciliation. The Algiers Motel incident was one of the most controversial and shameful series of events during the uprising. Even when acts of remembrance occur, such as in the case of the 2017 film *Detroit*, the recollection is simplistic and distorted. However, this distortion can be resolved or reconciled so long as memories of Detroit's past are investigated to counter the sanitized and dominate narratives of 1967.

Second, I asked how the rhetorical consequences of naming framed memories of the uprising and how those designations operate as acts of power. Two rhetorical maneuvers of naming were used to shape memories of 1967. The first one involved changing the name of 12th Street, which was associated with the Algiers Motel incident and the unrest of the summer of 1967, to Rosa Parks Boulevard. This act of naming shifted attention away from the complex

causes and consequences of the uprising towards fond yet sanitized memories of a civil rights icon. The second act of naming casts memories of the summer of 1967 as either a riot or uprising. To frame the events as a riot focuses attention on limited instances of rioting that did occur. But, more importantly, it operates through a radically coded lens that associates violent acts with black bodies. In comparison, labeling the event as an uprising frames the events as part of a broader frustration with complex sources of economic and racial inequality.

Third, I explored how rhetoric of public forgetting influences Detroit's capacity to move on from the uprising's legacy. After all, the importance of progressing as a community has perhaps never been more important for Detroit as 2017 brought forth not just the uprising's 50th anniversary, but continued steps in the city's redevelopment. The artifacts made in tribute to the anniversary and the discussions they inspired contain rhetorics of forgetting, which again, distort our understanding of the broader events of the civil rights struggle. But these singular acts of forgetting do not occur in a vacuum; instead, they build on and support one another. As a result, the absence of the Algiers Motel and 12th Street, the simplified account of the events found in Gordan Park, and the remaining of 12th Street, all operate to create a web of public forgetting. This leads to a symptom of what I call public amnesia, where layers of discourses of forgetting coalesce and grossly distort perception of the uprising. Because of these distorted and otherwise inaccurate memories of the events, many of those living in and around Detroit are left with a prolonged racial resentment, as city and suburban residents blame each other for the loss of Detroit.

However, the city cannot continue to remember the past through such a distorted lens. Forgetting, through a critical perspective, is a necessary step for Detroit to move beyond its

troubled past. I contend that discussion about the problems associated with current development projects and the continued discussion of the 50th anniversary of 1967 might offer an opportunity for reconciliation and productive forgetting. But forgetting in this sense cannot be a rushed process that is controlled by a few people. Instead, this kind of forgetting requires active participation by people currently excluded from dominant narratives about 1967 and Detroit redevelopment. Moreover, the process necessitates a compassionate consideration of the lingering tensions that remain in the city and acknowledges complex causes that lead to uprisings across the country. If the city is interested in leaving its past behind, it needs to engage in reconciliation with its past. However, the current discourses of absence, naming, and forgetting prevent critical acts of forgetting.

Notes

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- ² William Winkel, "Defending the divide" in Joel Stones' *Detroit 1967*
- ³ Thomas Sugrue, "Forward" in Joel Stones' *Detroit 1967*
- ⁴ Thomas Sugrue, *The origins of the urban crisis: race and inequality in post war Detroit*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ p9
- ⁵ Sidney Fine, *Violence in the model city: The Cavanagh administration, race relations, and the Detroit riot of 1967*, Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007, p.48
- ⁶ Sidney Fine, "Violence in the model city" p.92
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- ⁸ Amy Padnani, "Anatomy of Detroit's Decline," New York Times (December 8, 2013) retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/08/17/us/detroit-decline.html>
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- ¹⁰ Thomas A. Krug, "The deindustrialization of Detroit" p.67
- ¹¹ Thomas Sugrue, "The origins of the urban crisis" p.18
- ¹² Thomas Sugrue, "The origins of the urban crisis" p.148
- ¹³ Sidney Fine, "Violence in the model city" p. 95
- ¹⁴ Thomas Sugrue, "The origins of the urban crisis" p.241
- ¹⁵ Scott Martelle, *Detroit: A biography*, Chicago Review Press: Chicago, IL p. 109
- ¹⁶ Scott Martelle, "Detroit: A biography," p.310
- ¹⁷ Scott Martelle, "Detroit: A biography," p.149
- ¹⁸ Scott Martelle, "Detroit: A biography," p.151
- ¹⁹ Scott Martelle, "Detroit: A biography," p.153

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- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Scott Martelle, *“Detroit: A biography,”* p.154
- ²² Sidney Fine, *“Violence in the model city”* p. 96
- ²³ Sidney Fine, *“Violence in the model city”* p. 99
- ²⁴ Sidney Fine, *“Violence in the model city”* p. 102
- ²⁵ Sidney Fine, *“Violence in the model city”* p. 155
- ²⁶ Sidney Fine, *“Violence in the model city”* p. 164
- ²⁷ Bill McGraw, *“Detroit ’67 Hour by hour timeline,”* *Detroit Free Press* (Detroit, MI), July 23, 2017
- ²⁸ Bill McGraw *“Detroit ’67”*
- ²⁹ Bill McGraw *“Detroit ’67”*
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- ³⁵ Peter Blackmer, *“Police used myth of black snipers to justify brutality in the Long Hot Summer of 1967,”* Timeline.com (August 11, 2017). Web.
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⁴⁰ Sean Wilentz, *"The Kerner Report"* p. 8

⁴¹ Sean Wilentz, *"The Kerner Report"* p. 19

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Chapter 5 DISRUPTIVE MEMORY: THE FIST

On October 16, 1986, the city of Detroit unveiled a commemorative monument dedicated to the legacy of esteemed boxer and Detroit resident, Joe Louis. The monument immediately stirred controversy due to its unique scale and focus, as the Monument to Joe Louis was anything but an average statue. As a fixture in Detroit's downtown Hart Plaza, the monument is hard to miss at twenty-four feet in both height and length. With steel cables supporting the floating bronze figure, *The Fist*, as it is affectionately known, stoically rests in the center of Detroit.¹ In the time since its unveiling, public discourse surrounding the monument has been contentious as residents disagree on what the monument says about Louis and, more broadly, Detroit.² In light of such discrepancies, public response indicates that *The Fist* offers a larger, more complicated representation of Detroit. More than thirty years after *The Fist* was planted in Hart Plaza, disagreement still stirs as to what the monument projects and what those meanings hold for our understanding of the city. Yet, in a time of widespread change in Detroit, the monument is more representative than ever of the contentious perspectives taking hold during Detroit's redevelopment. Today, *The Fist* holds symbolic meaning that extends beyond the memory of Joe Louis or a material representation of black power initially granted to the site. Instead, *The Fist* embodies a public defiance in the face of capitalist attempts to cleanse the city's past to fashion Detroit into a blank canvas for new development ideas.

Just as residents disagree on meaning of *The Fist*, they similarly struggle to make sense of ongoing redevelopment throughout the city. Detroiters watch as the space around them evolves with the additions of new businesses and parks and an influx of new, hip guests who wish to take part in Detroit's resurrection. For Detroiters of old, the exciting changes are in

some cases welcomed. However, residents reject, dismiss, and refuse to take part in the justification for much of this activity: that Detroit is a blank slate ready to be used and created. The *tabula rasa* narrative is a rationale used by many billionaire investors, the tech industry, and communities of young people who see Detroit's weakened state as an opportunity to make their mark.³ For example, in a piece for the *New York Times*, Reif Larson writes, "As Capitalism returns to Detroit's downtown in all its feverish forms, you can see the city materialize before your eyes. It's like watching hot lava cool."⁴ While Larson excitedly declares Detroit as the city where people can come to "dream big," his sentiment conveniently looks past the thousands of residents still here, and the legacy that this 21st century lava-like development incinerates in its wake. While the arrival of communities wanting to take part in Detroit's recovery or establish a home here is not inherently problematic, the premises by which they justify these endeavors certainly can be as it reflects their perspective towards the city and its history. With prevailing motifs behind the future of Detroit grounded in beliefs of the city being desolate, dead, empty, vacant, and worthless, newcomers mistakenly approach the vulnerable city as being devoid of any legacy worth saving.⁵ In an expedition to seize Detroit and install their own ideas upon the city, these attempts to cleanse Detroit's incumbency is foiled by vestiges of the past that they must navigate, such as *The Fist*.

While *The Fist* prevails as a contentious site grounded in conflicting associations for Detroiters, it now stands as a symbolic monument to the character of Detroit and the community's refusal to allow others to dictate the city's future for them. Once more, with modern redevelopment in Detroit, *The Fist* becomes a key source of antagonism, but not over interpretations of its meaning. Because, while the material rhetoric of *The Fist* has been

observed for its connections to Joe Louis, the Black Power movement, and core racial disparities that have shaped Detroit, it presently operates as a source of defiance in the face of contemporary annexation. As Detroit's past is threatened by capitalist installations of a prospective "New Detroit," *The Fist* stands in its way, marking the city with defiant memories of the city's steadfast character. Thus, *The Fist* serves a contingent purpose as a disruptive force, where defiant memories of resistant logics shield the city's legacy, interrupting attempts to erase the city's past.

Throughout this chapter, two questions guide my analysis of *The Fist*. First what meaning does the monument hold for city that is external to the legacy of Joe Louis? Second, how does *The Fist* achieve a position as a contentious rhetorical force for Detroit, particularly in the context of the city's redevelopment? As I engage *The Fist's* present meaning as a contingent and antagonist mark that disrupts ongoing redevelopment, I argue *The Fist* as a site of defiant or disruptive memory, where embodied rhetoric disrupts revisions of the city's past and future. To advance this argument, this chapter proceeds initially by turning to salient figures grounded in the monument's images: Joe Louis' legacy and the raised fist symbol of rebellious solidarity. Afterwards, I explore notions of embodied memory and palimpsests as conceptual frameworks for understanding how the site cultivates longstanding sentiments of resistance and Detroit's legacy. As I apply these concepts, I analyze how *The Fist* becomes an emblem of defiant memory through three discourses. First, I turn to the monument's relation with contemporary slogans of Detroit pride as a rhetorical function of cultural projection. Next, I analyze *The Fist* in relation to the critically acclaimed 2011 Chrysler commercial, "Born of Fire," which speaks to embodied memories of the monument. Finally, I focus on *The Fist's* presence in the material

space of the city, arguing how the monument's position as a palimpsest has implications for the city's work to maneuver around these meanings. In all, I demonstrate how Detroit exists as a more expansive urban palimpsest, a space where *The Fist's* presence looms as a disruption against unwelcome efforts to overlook, dismiss, and erase the networks of memory that define how we see Detroit. To close, this chapter considers how embodied memories play a role for Detroit's ongoing renewal campaign, and how the legacy of embodied black resistance produced by *The Fist* challenges or supports the city's redevelopment

Not your Average Joe

Joseph Louis Barrow was born into modest means on May 13, 1914 in the small town of Lafayette, Alabama. One of eight children, Louis mostly kept to himself and was known for his quiet but compassionate demeanor. The Louis family moved to Detroit in 1926 after conflicts with a local Ku Klux Klan member pushed them away from Jim Crow conditions in the south. After settling into Detroit's Black Bottom neighborhood, Louis and his family struggled through the Great Depression but young Joseph managed to keep himself occupied and out of gang-related temptations by regularly boxing at a local youth center.⁶ In 1932, the seventeen-year-old Louis made his amateur boxing debut, making a name in the amateur circuit as he strung together an impressive fifty victories against three losses.

Known in boxing circles as the "Brown Bomber," Louis regularly defeated title-contenders and former champions with ease, but discriminatory forces in boxing's power structure prevented Louis from securing title bouts.⁷ By June 1936, however, Louis was scheduled to fight Max Schmeling, a thirty-year old heavyweight from Nazi-Germany whose 48 wins, 7 losses, and 4 draws indicated a successful, if somewhat turbulent, career.⁸ On the other

side, Joe Louis, the 22-year old number-one-ranked heavyweight in the world, walked into the bout with a spotless 24-0 record. Coverage prior to the fight ranged from Louis' confident demeanor to the ominous threat of German Chancellor Adolf Hitler. In a fight where most analysts predicted an early knockout victory for Joe Louis, Schmeling spent most of the early rounds peppering Louis with jabs and quick, short strikes. Two minutes into the twelfth round, Schmeling landed a powerful strike to Louis' body before following up with a right hand that connected cleanly on Louis' jaw. Louis crumpled to the canvas in a knockout as fans watched in shock.⁹ The upset stunned fans. However, for Louis, the Schmeling bout was only the beginning of their lifetime connection.¹⁰ Louis and Schmeling formally agreed to a rematch on June 22, 1938. However, much had changed in the two years since they had first met and quickly, the second Louis/Schmeling bout turned into a contest about America versus Nazi Germany.¹¹ A few weeks before the fight, President Roosevelt told Louis, "Joe, we need muscles like yours to beat Germany."¹² Public devotion for Louis soared, and he was no longer looked at on the streets as a black man, but an American hero. On the night of the fight, celebrities and politicians alike attended the sold-out Yankee Stadium while millions more tuned into the match on their radios.¹³ As the bell rang to start the match, Louis rushed forward with a ferocious barrage, knocking Schmeling to the canvas twice in the fight's early moments. Just after the two-minute mark in the very first round, Joe Louis had his hands raised following the one-sided victory while Schmeling lay motionless on the canvas.¹⁴ The fight was a rout, and Louis' victory instantly transformed the young man from a Detroit legend into a national icon.

Louis went on to enlist in the Army in January 1942, weeks after the Pearl Harbor attacks shook the nation. Louis fight record was 52-1 at the time, and his decision to enter the

military raised morale for Americans at home and abroad in the war effort. While in the Army, Louis regularly participated in charity bouts to entertain troops and raise funds for the military. He also occupied much of his time in the armed services by working with fellow black athletes Jackie Robinson and Sugar Ray Robinson to petition a break in the professional sports color barrier once they returned home.¹⁵ Louis' time in the military did not see action on the battlefield, but he proved an essential force in building morale amongst troops and working as a public relations resource for military advertising back home.

Despite Louis' devotion to building support for the war effort, he returned home to significant financial trouble. After officially retiring, Louis struggled to make ends meet but was still celebrated as the man who single-handedly took on Nazi Germany. Oddly enough, as World War II ended and Louis made his official exit from the ring, he developed a close friendship in a familiar foe: Max Schmeling. After the IRS finally forgave a considerable sum of debt the boxer owed in the 1960s, a financially ruined Louis started suffering from deteriorating psychiatric and cardiovascular health.¹⁶ In Louis's darkest hours, it was Schmeling who would help pay for Louis' medical costs and look after his former rival. Louis died on April 12, 1981, following a long struggle with various physical and mental ailments. For Louis's burial, President Reagan waived the requirements for burial in Arlington National Cemetery, allowing him to be laid to rest with full military honors. Reagan declared Louis, "more than a sports legend, his career was an indictment of racial bigotry and a source of pride and inspiration for people around the world."¹⁷ Louis's legacy in American mythos signified a moment in time where a black man transcended his socially restricted confines to become a national hero. Five years after being

laid to rest, Louis's resolve as a boxing legend and civil rights icon was immortalized in Detroit with a bronze image most befitting his legacy: a swinging fist.

When *The Fist* was revealed in 1986, the monument initially bothered onlookers who anticipated a traditional statue of the boxer rather than a massive disembodied arm. For one Detroiter, confusion prevailed as they declared, "It's terrible. I don't see the symbolism at all." For some, comedic sentiments followed, as Detroiter Barbara Johnson remarked, "I know money is tight, but you would think the city could have afforded a whole statue."¹⁸ Louis' son took a more open approach, arguing, "This is a monument of my father, [not] a statue of my father, that's the key. The sculptor is saying this is a monument to symbolize what my father stood for."¹⁹ For some residents, symbolism was bothersome, as one resident complained, "It is billed as a tribute to Joe Louis, but that looks like a black power fist."²⁰ This interpretation, of the monument as a representation of black power, resistance, and conflict, is one that still drives debates about the meaning of *The Fist* today.

For those vexed by the connotation of *The Fist*, their criticism centered on the monument's similarity to the raised fist salute. Earliest illustrations of the image date back to 1917, when a raised fist was used in material for the Industrial Workers of the World labor union.²¹ The symbol itself is a show of solidarity, union, or resistance, and is frequently referenced as the 'power fist' or 'resistance fist.' But the defiant associations with The Monument to Joe Louis are not merely located in the context of the raised fist, but a particularly iconic moment in black history as well. On October 16, 1968, after black American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos respectively secured gold and bronze Olympic medals in the 200-meter race, their public demonstration of black power shocked the world. As the

United States national anthem bellowed throughout Mexico's Olympic Stadium to honor the sprinters, Smith and Carlos bowed their heads and raised their fists. Each sprinter wore a black glove, holding the pose for the entirety of the anthem.²² Thus, while the statue itself is most readily recognized as a swinging fist engaged in combat or conflict, it is also informed by the iconic meaning of the raised fist and its connection to black power, as many Detroiters noted after the monument's reveal. Sentiments of black power and radical black activism in Detroit concerned some residents, as the city's well-documented racial tensions of the past were a legacy that some hoped would fade from focus. Detroit was also stage to some of the earliest stirrings of the Black Power Movement with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and mobilized grassroots efforts in the years following the 1968 Olympic demonstration.²³ Further, the image of the black fist, whether raised or swinging, became a symbolic gesture of black power across the country and racial discontent following the Civil Rights Movement.

Deciphering Detroit's Fist

The Fist was formally commissioned by Sports Illustrated to honor Louis as a figure whose importance in American culture extended much further than the boxing ring. But the structure invites visitors to see the sculpture as more than a tribute, and has since become an emblem for the city of Detroit. As a disembodied arm depicted mid-punch, coupled with the racial connotations of the Black Power Movement, *The Fist's* meaning is complicated yet simple, divisive yet unifying. For his part, sculptor Robert Graham argued that the piece was simply meant to commemorate the Joe Louis versus Max Schmeling fight from 1938.²⁴ Graham evades revealing his own interpretations of the monument, rarely connecting the statue to anything more than a battering ram. In relation to the other memory sites discussed

throughout this project, *The Fist* is the youngest of the mnemonic artifacts but perhaps the most profound. With Detroit changing at such a rapid pace, concern about the city's ability to retain its history is tied to material emblems like *The Fist*. Specifically, memory present in this site is noteworthy as it projects memories of resistance as a disruptive instrument against overpowering forces like the ongoing renewal. These memories are rhetorically tied to the material contingencies present in *The Fist*, a feature that previous scholarship highlights for its critical functions in the Detroit community.

Since its installation in 1986, *The Fist* has been examined by scholars interested in representations of race and cultural rhetoric in urban spaces. Initially, the statue prompts associations with racial difference and hostile sentiments tied to Detroit's race relations. For instance, in her 1992 essay on the cultural ramifications of *The Fist*, Donna Graves describes how contentious reactions to the statue's visual elements exemplify the discriminatory roots that mired Detroit. Her essay not only considers the dedication by Robert Graham in 1986, but the subsequent statue of Louis built in in Detroit's Cobo Convention Center in 1987 along with the city's Joe Louis Arena built in 1979.²⁵ Graves' work is illuminating because of two contexts she explores: the statements of sculptor Robert Graham as well as public response to the monument. On Graham's discussions and *The Fist's* legacy, he delights in the polarized responses, calling the tensions a "dream situation."²⁶ Rather than be disheartened by negative responses to his work, Graham embraces the criticism as it exemplifies the power of public art, challenging audiences to consider their own relation to the site's meaning.

Graves' discussion also focuses on residential critical levied at *The Fist*, noting the spatial implications of the site's presence in downtown Detroit. She describes how *The Fist* is an

inescapable rhetorical artifact because as residents travel to and from the city, they are “hit by the object.”²⁷ Overall, *The Fist’s* controversial interpretation centers on an antagonistic nature of the memorial. Many reactions condemned the statue for its violent premise, criticizing the image’s connections to the Black Power movement but also a celebrated embrace of violence. These critiques, however, demonstrate the rhetorical force of the statue. In other words, while Detroiters may attempt to avoid the statue’s presence in one way or another, they cannot escape the rhetorical energy of *The Fist* in their city. In one way, the presence of *The Fist* marks the city space with Joe Louis’s legacy, the story of a man’s defense for his country and democracy, only to come home and endure discriminatory injustice. Beyond the associations with Louis’s patriotism and his civil rights accomplishments, Graves notes how the object’s antagonistic connotations symbolize the tough resilience that has come to define the city’s character. As such, *The Fist* arrests visitors in a recollection of discriminatory resistance as their encounters hit them with a visual peculiarity that invites them to consider the object’s scope. Yet, at the same time, the monument metonymically displays a visual form of Detroit’s character for all to see throughout the city and beyond as *The Fist* is tied to visions of the city.

However, Detroit and *The Fist* monument not only generates diachronic interpretations of Detroit’s urban space, it also operates as a material rhetoric of the closed fist gesture.²⁸ In a 1998 essay, Richard Marback argues that the monument’s meaning cannot be reduced to the singular moment in which the work was unveiled. Rather, he contends, to understand the artifact’s meaning, critics must examine the connotations associated with the sculpture over time. To this end, the monument appeals to a sentiment Marback calls “Detroit’s agony...[a] lived agony that becomes a warning for us all” which was a frequent subject of Detroit coverage

during the 1970s.²⁹ However, this sense of agony typically included in coverage on Detroit crime, blight, or recession is one rejected by residents. Detroit's mayor at the time, Coleman Young, regularly condemned these representations while confronting the ill-informed authority of national media for their perpetual misrepresentations of the city.³⁰ But the addition of *The Fist* counters the national narrative about Detroit's supposedly agonizing reality and instead strikes back against those who seek to impose their own reading of Detroit space and culture. Moreover, Marback demonstrates how spatial productions of *The Fist* seize control of Detroit imaginations away from those who did not live there in the first place.³¹ In other words, the monument is a material force that embodies Detroit culture while also striking against outsiders who attempt to define the city's image from afar. As Marback argues, "The point is to develop strategies for theorizing how inscriptions of memories, hopes, and fears on words, bodies, and cities, in discourses, cultural practices, and material space enable and constrain gestures of rhetorical agency."³² The enclosed fist of the Joe Louis monument merges mnemonic associations with an empowered gesture, a fist, to illustrate black agency. Hence, the image of an enormous fist suspended from steel cables in the heart of Detroit becomes an emblem of black resistance that simultaneously marks Detroit with a collective sentiment of resistance.

Other scholars additionally maintain that the imagery of a swinging fist is what enables the structure to secure associations beyond Louis and align with the struggle of black resistance in the United States. Gallagher and LaWare, for example, explore the counter-mnemonic and critical rhetorics found in the monument.³³ They ground their analysis in a thorough discussion of the site's disembodied nature. The sculpture's social significance is heightened by the common reference to it simply as *The Fist*, an association made possible by the limited and

disembodied nature of the object.³⁴ By erecting a monument of abstract associations, *The Fist* operates as an emotionally gripping site, prompting contested public response. These contentious readings are what Gallagher and LaWare describe as rhetorical manifestations of cultural projection. They suggest that that *The Fist* exists as a force of cultural production, a counter-hegemonic instrument of seizing control of the way social groups are displayed. Merelman defines black cultural projection as a counter public effort by disenfranchised black communities to regain control of social representations of their social group to challenge the dominant narrative.³⁵ Cultural projection is a practice grounded in resistance, where, in the case of *The Fist*, residents refuse to allow outside entities to control their representations on a national or public platform. However, the statue becomes a source of cultural projection because of a confluence of contexts, not simply because of the combative visual element of the closed fist. Because of the physical location, connection to other public works, and the temporal context in Detroit history when *The Fist* was dedicated, the site evolves beyond a public memorial to a site of cultural connotation and Detroit's racial legacy.³⁶ In total, *The Fist* becomes more than a place of public memory, but a reflective cradle in addition to a source of cultural projection for Detroiters.

While Gallagher and Laware's argue *The Fist's* projections produce cultural frameworks for Detroiters, Marback reminds us that these rhetorics are not static, but shift as the city changes as well.³⁷ As he notes, "As an object of rhetoric The Fist is not a fixed entity given over to some static meaning that lies hidden elsewhere. It is an object vulnerable to our encounters."³⁸ Marback focuses on the common association between *The Fist* and the Black

Power Movement, suggesting that the site's meaning is not located only in resistance from the past, but an ongoing struggle. He adds:

The task of theories of embodied rhetoric is to trace the intensity and duration of rhetorical energy, to follow the projective ebb and flow of expressive energy through human bodily activities: through gesture, through contact and manipulation of objects, through movement through space.³⁹

As such, we should not limit the resistant origins of *The Fist* to the legacy of the Black Power Movement; instead, we should consider how these rhetorics build as the surrounding city changes over time. In other words, critiquing embodied memories found in the monument should extend from the rhetorical values found in the monument's 1986 dedication to include symbolic functions of the statue during the city's current redevelopment and these same sentiments previous to *The Fist's* installation. Marback's call for scholars to consider embodied rhetorics of *The Fist* diachronically suggests that those cultural projections highlighted by Gallagher and LaWare may shift as well since the object's value matures. In a 2008 essay, Marback reexamines *The Fist* and investigates the dynamic nature of *The Fist* as a changing and malleable symbol. In both works, Marback advances an important conclusion on *The Fist* as a marking on Detroit's urban landscape as opposed to a singular meaning, granting the monument a dynamic and transformative presence. I extend on this work by examining how this resistant monument works within the current context of urban renewal and development. In my analysis, I explicate how this function as a contingent and resistant mark prevents erasure and foreclosure of memories of Detroit's past.

This body of scholarship offers several key findings on the monument's influence on meanings associated with Detroit's past, present, and future. There are two concepts in this literature and related fields that are of particular importance to this chapter's analysis. The first

concerns the rhetoric of embodiment that Graves and Marback discuss. Marback examines *The Fist* to explore an embodied rhetoric of objects, noting the possibility for artifacts to embody the cultures, ideas, and information necessary to install these embodied ideas onto those who engage them. Similarly, Paul Connerton illustrates how embodied memories do not only manifest factual memories of historical episodes, but also the sentiments attached to those memories, which ensure certain meanings and memories of the past are not lost over time.⁴⁰ Taken together, these perspectives on embodied rhetorical memory provide a useful framework for studying how particular memories are attached to *The Fist* and how their projections challenge Detroit in certain moments to recall this embodied legacy.

The second concept is the palimpsest, a conceptual metaphor that appeals to temporal contingencies of the monument's presence as several contexts change around it. Kroessler explains how palimpsests are fundamentally forms of preservation, describing them as, "structures characterized by superimposed features produced at two or more distinct periods."⁴¹ Reading texts as palimpsests gives us the ability to see the multidirectional readings they hold in the past as well as the present. Moreover, Groote tells us how meanings of any palimpsest text are grounded in double structures of memory, where rhetoric preserves the meanings of before while enabling the text to assume new ideas as well.⁴² Extending this perspective to cities as lived, contingent, immutable palimpsests, Andreas Huyssen, writes:

What is now emerging is the more intriguing notion of [cities] as palimpsest, a disparate city-text that is being rewritten while previous text is preserved, traces are restored, erasures documented, all of it resulting in a complex web of historical markers that point to the continuing heterogeneous life of a vital city that is as ambivalent of its built past as it is of its urban future.⁴³

To that end, two qualities of Huyssen's definition of the city-text palimpsest are essential as I proceed through this chapter. The first concerns *The Fist* itself, specifically the embodied rhetorics it holds from before that the monument goes on to assume in modern Detroit. The second, however, is Detroit itself as a palimpsest of rewritten, but simultaneously preserved legacies that *The Fist* directly faces as a radically contingent force in the city's redevelopment. To this end I suggest that *The Fist* functions as a palimpsest of the resistant character in Detroit over time, which exists in a larger, more expansive urban palimpsest, the city itself.

To best engage the dynamic rhetorical features of *The Fist* as they function for Detroit's 21st century redevelopment, my analysis proceeds in three parts. First, I explore the cultural projections rhetorically bound to *The Fist* and their larger implications for the city. Although Gallagher and LaWare discuss these projections as well, I wish to extend from their work a discussion as to how these projections appeal to contemporary manifestations of defiance that unify Detroiters. Second, I examine embodied memories of resistance connected with *The Fist* through its productions during interactions with Detroit publics. Finally, my investigation of *The Fist* focuses on the monument's role as a radical marking on Detroit as a palimpsest. The rhetorical framework of the palimpsest appeals directly to those notions of blank slates that regularly emerge in discussions of a new, supposedly improved, futures for the city. In all, these rhetorical nuances of *The Fist* demonstrate how the monument is a key force of disrupting the trending efforts to purge Detroit of its legacy to install a new Detroit altogether.

The Fist's Memory: Contingent Rhetorics

The Fist is a peculiar memory site because its manifested commemoration is toward that of a boxer, not sentiments of black resistance or urban character in Detroit. Whereas memory

sites like 12th Street or The Sweet House earn mnemonic value following controversial histories, *The Fist* is the only site that was installed or planted onto the city, distinguishing itself from the other artifacts I study in this project. Thus, my analysis considers how public associations with *The Fist* came to exceed Joe Louis's legacy to projections of defiance for contemporary Detroiters. I examine the way sites like *The Fist* rhetorically secure cultural sediments through the study of embodied rhetorics of cultural memory. I argue that this larger study should not simply consider the context toward sites of material memory from their past or present, but the future as well. After all, Detroit is a city in transition, the ends of which are not only unclear, but grounded in anxiety as well. Thus, while the collected discussions by Graves, Marback, Gallagher and LaWare are undoubtedly valuable, their analysis could not anticipate the radical changes the city has faced recently and what this holds for Detroit's future. With the future in mind, I build on these works and expand upon the role of memory production as it relates to Detroit's famous fist.

Cultural Projections

Gallagher and Laware's analysis of *The Fist* makes a poignant observation that the object itself projects cultural ideations onto nearby publics. Their assessment conceives of *The Fist* as an object of collective agency where residents seize an opportune set of contingencies surrounding the object to introduce a marker of continued public discourse. As Gallagher and Laware tell us, the site remains an emotionally engaging and regularly debated subject of Detroit identity, citing how that *The Fist* represents the "bull-headed determination and... endurance" of Detroit.⁴⁴ And while their investigation toward the connections of *The Fist*, civil rights, and the city of Detroit situate the object as a place of material memory; the site's

productive influence is left untreated as we look around us. Thus, I extend how the site not only represents a legacy of civil rights history, but also carries cultural projections toward Detroiters through the subtexts of resistance concretized in *The Fist*. I argue that the site installs a sentiment of repudiation through discursive cultural projections that have since become cultural campaigns in the city. Specifically, I examine how *The Fist* is an emblematic cultural signifier for discourses about Detroit's antagonistic, gritty, resolute ethos, such as those attached to clothing brands *Detroit vs. Everybody* and *Detroit Hustles Harder*. In both discursive examples, the image of *The Fist* operates as one source of cultural projection that unifies Detroiters around a dissenting sentiment while more broadly signaling the resolve and independence that distinguish the city.

While some urban brands are associated with visual links such as city skylines, iconic buildings or celebrities, Detroit's recent branding has been tied to clothing slogans like *Detroit Hustles Harder* and *Detroit vs. Everybody*. The first of these, *Detroit Hustles Harder*, was created in 2007 when Aptemal Clothing cofounders Brendon Blumentritt and JP O'Grady noticed a melancholy narrative spreading throughout Detroit, and, thus, sought a slogan that reflected pride in the city's character. Blumentritt elaborated, "Detroit is a hardworking city. It's not like New York or Los Angeles where you're there because you're somebody. In Detroit, you're proving yourself through your work here."⁴⁵ The slogan went on to be a massive hit for Detroiters who noted that support for the "pride, devotion, and underdog" ethos surrounding their hometown is what fueled its popularity.⁴⁶ Along with the proud sense of Detroit identity captured in the *Detroit Hustles Harder* slogan, the sentiment behind their phrase is combative, implicitly making a statement about other cities just as much as it does about Detroit. That is,

while the slogan makes an argument on its superior hustle, audiences are given agency to fill in the blank of which city Detroit hustles harder than. At its heart, the slogan is a simple appeal to the devoted, hard-working, blue-collar mindset that framed Detroit's manufacturing past and survivalist present.

A similar theme was captured a few years later as the city sat on the verge of bankruptcy, when graphic designer Tommey Walker introduced his own slogan echoing a similar sentiment, *Detroit vs. Everybody*. Walker filed the trademark for his *Detroit vs. Everybody* (DVE) clothing line in 2012 to speak to Detroit's "me against the world" attitude.⁴⁷ While slogans like *Run DET*, *Made in Detroit*, along with *Detroit Hustle's Harder*, were rising in popularity at the time, *Detroit vs. Everybody* made a clear argument on its own: as a city, Detroit is a fighter. For one Detroit reporter, the slogan "speaks to that kind of hardscrabble, down-on-its-luck aspect of Detroit, but not in a jokey or novelty way. It's not a punch line, it's not making fun. It acknowledges the struggle."⁴⁸ That acknowledgement of Detroit's struggle is what made the brand so successful, as it seemed to look directly at those communities outside of Detroit looking to take advantage of its vulnerability, and it says, "beat it." The brand was an immediate success but exploded in national popularity following the 2014 hip-hop track named after the brand. Featuring rappers Eminem, Big Sean, Royce da 5'9" and Danny Brown, "Detroit vs. Everybody" is a fast-paced song where each of the Detroit native rappers relate their personal struggles in Detroit to then return and defend their city later in life.⁴⁹ The song, like the slogan, is a simple but stern reminder that Detroit is a city of people unafraid of tough times who carry a headstrong devotion to their hometown. For Walker, a Detroit native and the DVE owner, "Detroit vs. Everybody embodies the pride and unapologetic spirit of our beloved

Detroit. Consider the DVE brand your official welcoming committee. We are the city; take us with you.”⁵⁰ Not too long after DVE’s entry to the plane of popular culture, other companies began appropriating the phrase for cities like Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, among many others. While the “versus everybody” slogan has since extended to other city spaces and community organizing campaigns, it is a sentiment that is definitely Detroit in its unapologetic defense and unabashed confidence.

While the *Detroit Hustles Harder* and *Detroit vs. Everybody* brands may seem to operate external to *The Fist*, their aggressive, combative, and prideful rhetoric are cultural projections located in sites like the 1986 monument. This is not to say that *The Fist* is the only source with which Detroiters cultivate an “us versus them” or “underdog” mindset. In *The Fist*, however, we see a fixture of Detroit’s past and present projecting the rhetoric of obstinacy these brands draw from in their later emergence. In other words, while Detroit is regularly portrayed as a tough and combative town; *The Fist* is a material anchor for that ethos, allowing similar discourses to circulate as we envision the city as it moves into the future.

At their cores, discourses like *Detroit Hustles Harder* and *Detroit vs. Everybody* reflect the combative determination Detroiters foster in defense of their city’s relevance on the national scale. Before these slogans, a similar sense of pride was grounded in Detroit’s history through visual elements that came to embody that framework, in this case, *The Fist*. As a visual reproduction of a swinging punch frozen in time, the monument generates rhetorical values like aggression or conflict, which convey that Detroit is, at its heart, a fighter. These resistant logics are not only projected onto Detroiters in 1986 when *The Fist* debuts, but long before and well after as well. Recall Marback who, reminds that we cannot limit these associations to a moment

or a singular cause, but broader, expansive resistant maneuvers instead.⁵¹ While these oppositional expressions existed before *The Fist*, the monument places these sentiments into bronze, anchoring its projections to Detroit space. *The Fist's* presence ensures that these projections articulated in mottos like *Detroit Hustles Harder* and *Detroit vs. Everybody* do not fade from public attention in a way that a movement or trend would do so. Instead, *The Fist* preserves these projections rhetorically, installing them onto the city where their resolute pride emerges later on in popularized slogans that embody this definitive Detroit spirit.

Embodied Defiance: Habitus

While *The Fist* anchors a critical ethos about the city to refute or rebuke certain representations of their community, how the monument embodies these meanings in the first place is a rhetorical production as well. Specifically, I suggest that *The Fist* operates as a material site of embodied memory. By embodied memories, I mean the way objects rhetorically embody representations of an idea or vision tied to a particular culture. Sites of embodied memory impart cultural premises and customs on publics living near or regularly engaging their adjacent spaces. Connerton introduces embodied memory as an extension to collective memory, where transmissions of cultural memories are achieved through embodied cultural representations in instances of signification, performance, or practice. As he explains, "Images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances."⁵² Frameworks of embodied memory situate the narrated past as a constitutive feature of present and future action. Connerton adds that commemoration only, "proves to be commemorative only in so far as it is performative; performativity cannot be thought without a concept of habit; and habit cannot be thought only

as a notion of bodily automatism.”⁵³ While Connerton focuses on the human motions or acts we determine as “normal,” we can extend this idea to the clenched fist as it swings at residents in the time of its dedication and against those looking to take control of Detroit’s future. In all, *The Fist* embodies modal logics of dissent that cultivate an oppositional attitude that resists the looming attempts to overwrite and supplant Detroit’s character through redevelopment.

Because cultural performance is an extension of commemorative practice, we can judge *The Fist*’s rhetorical prominence as to how it promotes cultural visions for its audience. But the degree to which publics are invited to perform vis-à-vis public memory is particular to each mnemonic site, as places of memory invite diverse forms of response or performance.⁵⁴ Whereas some memory sites embody a rhetorical production through physical encounter, others enact similar strategies through visualized iconography or aesthetic features. For *The Fist*, notions of embodied memory exist in three rhetorical elements that preserve Detroit’s cultural character: authenticity, habitus, and polysemy. Through these features, *The Fist* operates as an object of embodied memory where rhetorical narrations branch from the site itself to external texts, such as the highly-celebrated and critically-acclaimed 2011 Chrysler commercial, “Born of Fire.” Throughout this text, *The Fist* ascends from a memory site of the city’s past to a position as the material form of Detroit’s spirit. The commercial and its references to the monument achieve this embodied position by first placing *The Fist* as the source of an ostensibly rugged sense of Detroit identity. Next, the commercial displays a performed and learned cultural habitus entwined with Detroit, marking the Motor City as a place where intruders are challenged and capitalist opportunists are contested. Finally, from

the polysemic readings we can pull from the “Imported From Detroit” campaign, associations from Detroit’s industrial past move onto the city’s latest most valuable commodity: itself.

While the 2011 Chrysler commercial is originally designed to reveal the new Chrysler 200 model, it received significant praise for how it portrayed Detroit and its ethos. Aired during the Super Bowl in February 2011, the commercial earned an Emmy and an abundance of acclaim in national media outlets.⁵⁵ “Born of Fire” opens with several short scenes featuring blue-collar workers like doormen and police officers, along with shots of manufacturing buildings and snow-covered smokestacks. As the camera moves past a highway marker for I-75 North toward Detroit, a narrator asks:

What does this city know about luxury, hm? What does a town that’s been to hell and back know about the finer things in life? Well I’ll tell ya: more than most. You see, it’s the hottest fires that make the hardest steel. Add hard-work and conviction, and the know-how that runs generations deep in every last one of us. That’s who we are, that’s our story. Now it’s probably not the one you’ve been reading in the papers. The one being written by the folks who have never even been here and don’t know what we’re capable of. Because when it comes to luxury, it’s as much about where it’s from as who it’s for.⁵⁶

The narrator goes on to specifically distinguish Detroit from other cities like New York City, Chicago, and Las Vegas, at which point, Detroit native and hip-hop superstar Eminem emerges from a Chrysler 200 to say, “This is the Motor City, and this is what we do.”⁵⁷ The commercial fades to black before the tagline, “Imported from Detroit” appears on the screen to close the advertisement. Visually and discursively, “Born of Fire” appeals to a strength and durability that mark Detroit’s past and its present. Moreover, the commercial directly challenges inaccurate national perceptions of Detroit by asking the viewer to question the story that is “you’ve been reading in the papers. The one being written by the folks who have never even been here and don’t know what we’re capable of.”⁵⁸ In all, the commercial appeals to Detroit’s blue-collar

culture of perseverance along with visual turns to manufacturing and survival. After the narrator appeals to Detroiters' unassuming lifestyles, the camera circles *The Fist* and he goes on to say, "it's the hottest fires that make the hardest steel." From this moment and subsequent allusions in 2011's "Born of Fire," *The Fist* becomes the defining image of Detroit's identity.

The commercial binds *The Fist* with Detroit identity through implicit appeals to the monument's prominence in Detroit memory. Visually, the commercial is a survey of the city's landscape and therefore includes very few glimpses of noteworthy locations or figures. The commercial does this to encompass all of Detroit in its argument, focusing instead on the everyday people, their jobs, and the struggles they likely endure either through labor or rigorous weather conditions. Other than Eminem, the visual images that command the viewer's focus are *The Fist*, *The Spirit of Detroit* monument, Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry Murals*, and one of the Quadriga statues atop Detroit's Wayne County Building. These landmarks are displayed in moments where the narrator comments on the generational character and resilience imbued in Detroiters despite the challenges they overcome. By including *The Fist* among these key sites of Detroit history, the commercial places *The Fist* is on the same plane of significance as these markers, in that they represent Detroit's purportedly authentic core. The first image, the Quadriga statue, portrays a horse-drawn chariot with an elegant figure standing in the carriage with outstretched arms toward the sky. Two of these Quadriga statues were built and dedicated in Detroit between 1897-1903, where they now sit atop the Wayne County Building. The figures standing in the chariots are recognized as personified representations of development in the city of Detroit, and the statues are aptly named *Victory* and *Progress*, with the latter included in the 2011 commercial.⁵⁹ Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry Murals* is the

second visual display of iconic Detroit symbols, a two-panel mural that depicts the manufacturing advancements that earned Detroit its Motor City nickname. *The Spirit of Detroit* monument found outside of Detroit's municipal center is the third symbol in the advertisement. As a representation of hope, progress, and mankind's spirit, the statue holds an orb in one hand to represent divinity and a family in the other hand as an uplifting to the noblest human relationships.⁶⁰ Together, in a globally televised advertisement during the most-watched event of 2011, these four monuments function as representative emblems for the character that constitutes and distinguishes Detroit.

In addition to *The Fist's* placement along these three iconic artifacts that exist as key cultural features for Detroit, the narrated metaphor about fire and steel as the monument strikes the screen is noteworthy as well. Expressing how the "hottest fires make the hardest steel" as the intimidating bronze fist is slowly circled, the advertisement links *The Fist* to Detroit's identity by combing the city with the ability to fight back, endure, and become stronger in the wake of intense challenges. The comment suggests that Detroit identity has been forged over time through the fiery trials of struggle, controversy, and conflict. To that end, Chrysler's "Born of Fire" demonstrates *The Fist's* mnemonic meaning in extension to the story of Joe Louis, where it also operates a rhetorical embodiment of Detroit's resilient memory. In concert with several significant images surveyed in the 2011 commercial, *The Fist* operates as an artifact where memories of struggle are embodied and an urban ethos and cultural projection of perseverance constantly circulates.

The second key mnemonic rhetoric embodied in *The Fist* and drawn upon in the 2011 commercial is a sense of habitus displayed as Detroiters navigate the city's position in American

discourse. By habitus, I mean the cultural dispositions created in response to previous experiences that provide a framework of understanding current or future encounters with similar circumstances or structures. Bourdieu introduces habitus as a concept that builds in response to socialized encounters with external structures such as communities, institutions, or cultures.⁶¹ A person or community's sense of habitus shapes their social understanding in relation to the larger world, and recognizing positions where opportunities for agency or resistance open. In other words, habitus is the socialized blueprint that shapes our sense of self in relation to social structures that are either reinforced or challenged as new conditions arise. For Detroit, habitus embodied in *The Fist* is one of collective opposition, a response triggered and acted upon as unwelcome attempts to appropriate Detroit agitate its residents.

Once the 2011 Chrysler commercial was aired, local Detroit media was abuzz at finally seeing a national campaign for their city that expressed pride in their way of life. As one outlet noted, Detroiters are unapologetic, proud, and refuse to play second fiddle to the larger cities in America.⁶² The commercial appealed to this same sense of hometown pride by criticizing the prevailing and misguided narratives about Detroit produced by figures who have yet to take any time to understand or engage the city directly. Moreover, the advertisement directly identifies cities often recognized as desirable places to visit or tour and, rather than concede to this hierarchy, argue that the Motor City is just as admirable. In all, the commercial articulates an antagonistic ethos the narrator suggests outsiders do not understand about the city. This combative and unapologetic stance is the first mode by which the ad appeals to Detroit's habitus. In drawing distinctions between Detroit and other cities on working class values, perceptions of luxury, and the gritty resolve of its people, the commercial illustrates Detroit's

headstrong habitus. This socially defined habitus is one of the frameworks that constitute Detroiters in ways of confronting the difficult times to defend and fight for their city against attempts to diminish or belittle Detroit's value.

Beyond the narrator's vocalized appeal to Detroit habitus, Chrysler's tagline is itself a reflection of the defiant habitus aligned with *The Fist*. Simple but effective, "Imported from Detroit," suggests that Detroit produces a level of quality we expect from imported luxury vehicles. Yet, beyond this obvious meaning, the tagline reflects the prideful sense of separation and confidence found in Detroit's cultural habitus. As a company once located in Detroit's city limits, Chrysler's suggestion for American consumers to import their vehicles from Detroit positions the city as a seemingly foreign but exceptional space altogether. The tagline is effective on two fronts. First, it appropriates and reverses the misguided perceptions of Detroit as foreign. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the "Imported from Detroit" tagline in tandem with the commercial's frequent celebration of Detroit's ethos emboldens the sense of pride and hope for the Motor City's preservation. Released during a time of mostly negative news stories about the city's debt, corruption, and crime, the Chrysler tagline reminds the city of its value and cultural significance despite attempts to diminish their city.

The Chrysler advertisement is an appeal to the toughness and grit of Detroit and a petition for the city to recall the cultural elements that define this city and defend them. This sense of resistance is what articulates Detroit's cultural habitus to *The Fist*; a monument that plainly and clearly inscribes the importance of fighting back. In all, the cultural habitus concretized in *The Fist* and later recalled in the 2011 commercial suggests that Detroit's value is

not solely tied to its automotive productions or material exports; instead, it is found in the determined, resilient, and unshakable Detroiters who drive America forward.

While Detroit habitus is called upon rhetorically across several moments in the commercial, this social structuration exists external as it is articulated to *The Fist* in the commercial. While the advertisement appeals to a habitus built on defiance, determination, and self-reliance, this same disposition is hailed rhetorically from and attached to the material site that both informs and embodies this ethos. While the nature of this habitus originates long before *The Fist's* installation or the sentiments communicated in t-shirt slogans, the monument becomes the present-day symbolic anchor where that habitus is visually embodied. Moreover, the habitual character generated through the monument remains in eternal presence, always reminding the city of a rebellious ethos against those who misrepresent or attempt to challenge it. Bourdieu alludes to this concept in his discussion of an instinctual trait or “feel of the game” that individuals hold as a byproduct of their socialized contexts.⁶³ For Detroiters the feeling embodied in *The Fist* is that of a defensive response in moments of threat, as the city’s past is marked by moments that inform this framework. Therefore, as the city enters a period of change on a number of cultural, economic, and social fronts, *The Fist* protects this rebellious habitus and threatens to disrupt those who want to take advantage of the city’s recovery.

An Enduring Mark

While commercialized discourses rhetorically connect cultural projections and embodied memories to *The Fist*, the monument’s physical position in the city challenges any attempt to overlook or neglect its material presence. Thus, how the monument stands in Detroit public space has implications for *The Fist's* influence on material and symbolic levels.

Monumental elements like scale, material, positioning, and depiction build a rhetorical vision about the city's resolute attitude. These features operate as a forceful element in the Detroit palimpsest that resists erasure and overwriting Detroit's past. In other words, *The Fist's* various material features work to maintain memories that loom over Detroit's past, present, and future. While some meanings associated to *The Fist* may change over time – such as its relationship to the Black Power Movement or defiance towards outsiders' depictions of the city – the object's presence as a powerful fist in the heart of the downtown district works to constantly disrupt the charming and modern discourses about a rising "New Detroit."

What is perhaps most striking about *The Fist* is the sheer enormity of the colossal monument. At twenty-four feet high and twenty-four feet in length, the monument is unlike any other in its magnitude of physical presence. While the monument's sculptor Robert Graham provided little in terms of interpretation of his work before his death, he was noted for referring to the work as a battering ram.⁶⁴ His association between the monument and a rudimentary siege engine makes sense, given that if nothing else, the rhetoric of scale tied to the artifact radiates a raw sense of overwhelming strength and power. That power is arresting, as Gallagher and LaWare note, as the monument's size and scale are two of the primary reasons the object generates polarized reactions in Detroit.⁶⁵ Adding to *The Fist's* magnitude, the material the monument is made from reinforces the object's capacity to seize our attention. Made entirely of bronze, *The Fist* weighs in at eight thousand pounds and sits suspended above its Hart Plaza venue with a network of cables holding it still.⁶⁶ Thus, the monument is neither hollow nor fragile, as the solid bronze statue is incapable of swaying in the wind yet endures the hardships of cold winters and the passing time all the same. Unlike other

sites like the 8 Mile Wall or Ossian Sweet House, where the site must be regularly attended to and repaired, *The Fist* is virtually immovable and seems indestructible. As such, interpretations of power, strength, and perseverance expressed by *The Fist* are not only immutably tied to the monument; they are rhetorically planted in Detroit through its presence as well. As a giant and grand fist in the middle of the city's downtown district, *The Fist's* magnitude renders Detroit incapable of eluding its defiant legacy. Instead, *The Fist* forces those in the present and future to reflect on those memories and discourses anchored by its colossal presence, to remember that Detroit's heritage is one of defiance, which began with people like Joe Louis and figures in the black freedom struggle. As a permanent marking on Detroit, the monument prevents others from simply sanitizing its space to be written anew and instead, protects its legacy's presence.

Yet, it was not simply the enormity of *The Fist's* presence that bothered audiences when the monument was publicly revealed; instead, it was its depiction. As a massive sculpture of a disembodied arm frozen as it punches forward, a noted criticism of *The Fist* is despite a purported intent to honor Joe Louis, the boxer is really nowhere to be found. Instead, what audiences are left with is a twenty-four-foot bronze arm seemingly punching at all those who pass it by. While Louis's face, boxing gloves, and fighting stance are divorced from *The Fist*, their absence invites audiences to read the statue in three ways that strengthen the embodied opposition bound to the monument. First, the monument's singular focus as a swinging fist allows audiences to focus on Louis's legacy as a symbol of strength. For example, the swinging fist pays tribute to Louis's power in the ring, but also his fight for civil rights justice. Similarly, the combative associations with the swinging strike connects public memories of Joe Louis to Detroit's ethos of struggle, a cultural habitus that existed before *The Fist's* arrival but is now

fixed upon the heart of the city. Second, although some critics clamored for the monument to include a boxing glove, its omission serves a rhetorical function of disassociating the monument, Louis's legacy, and embodied memories of resistance away from the boxing ring.⁶⁷ Although Louis is primarily associated with his boxing dominance and athletic prowess, *The Fist's* absent boxing glove allows audiences to interpret who or what is on the receiving end of the structure's punch. Had the fist been gloved, we are left to assume that the swinging punch is meant for one of Louis's lauded foes, like Max Schmeling. But as an unsheathed fist, the monument earns rhetorical openings that extend *The Fist's* adversarial associations outside of boxing. This simple element broadens the structure's foe from individual bodies to larger, more structural institutions like white supremacy, mediated distortions of the city, or development organizations working to erase the presence of Detroit's past.

Third, the most important absent visual element of *The Fist* is ironically what strengthens its rhetorical reach: a detachment from the dedicated figure, Joe Louis. While this may seem odd and has been a point of contention for those who wished Louis's likeness was more obviously included in the sculpture, Graham's omission of Louis's face, bust, and the rest of his body is what empowers *The Fist* to become the transcendent mnemonic site it is today. Even had the monument been built to scale as a giant bronze body standing over Detroit, public memory rhetorically fixed to the object would have been grounded in the context of Louis's life and career, limiting its more radically contingent meaning. Instead, as the faceless, disembodied, but threatening arm, *The Fist* achieves much more. Without any visual features to tie the monument Louis alone, the swinging fist is divorced from a single person, allowing others to see themselves as the body behind *The Fist*. Since the monument is not made visually

exclusive to Louis's body, *The Fist* becomes a memory site that embodies Detroit's legacy of dissent not only in the period of Louis's life, but across history as a whole. By limiting Louis's likeness with *The Fist* to nothing more than his punch, the monument's meaning becomes unlimited and now stands as a contingent force in Detroit; a fist powered by Louis's and Black Power's defiant lives, but left radically open to mean different things to future generations.

The final material feature of *The Fist's* presence that impacts collective memory about Detroit is its spatial position in the city. Situated at the corner of Jefferson and Woodward Avenues, *The Fist* is not tucked away in a closed space or obscured by the walls of a museum. Rather, *The Fist* sits front and center at one of the busiest corners of traffic in Detroit's downtown.⁶⁸ As a result, the monument is virtually inescapable, and as scores of people come to and from the city for work or leisurely purposes, *The Fist* is there to greet them. This frequent interaction with the statute invites people to regularly think about the object's rhetorical presence as an emblem of the city's tenacious and unwavering character. Rhetorically, sentiments produced from the regular encounters with the site remind audiences that Detroit's past, the city's character, and Detroiters as a community do not hide under the shadows of dominance, they confront them head on. As an embodied representation of a legacy of striking back against those who wish to cast the city in a negative light or expunge the city's past, *The Fist* is not hidden from sight, but stands in its openly brash presence, enduring the city's challenges. Moreover, at its perch in Hart Plaza, *The Fist* is among a network of monumental representations of Detroit's legacy. Fixed precisely in the center of the city, the monument ensures that its legacy cannot be forgotten through its brazen imagery. Believed to be the site where Antoine Laumet de Cadillac landed in 1701 to settle the land of Detroit, Hart

Plaza is more than any old open space for Detroit; it's where the city originated.⁶⁹ Also included in Hart Plaza are the *Transcending* and *Gateway to Freedom* Memorials, monuments respectively dedicated to the legacies of union organizing and the Underground Railroad. In many ways, Hart Plaza hosts the essence of Detroit's collective memories about its past, as far back as the city's settlement while including many dedications to Detroiters efforts to resist and challenge moments of historical injustice.

Looming above these structures at the Plaza's crest is *The Fist*, floating above the city as a perpetual mark that shapes the city's present and future. Unlike most commemorative objects that are grounded, painted, or affixed to the space in which they are dedicated, *The Fist* literally hangs over Detroit, suspended by the steel reinforced cables stretching from the monument's support pyramid. *The Fist's* suspension above the ground projects a certain detached quality to the memorial. Suspended from above, the monument is forever stuck in a motion of swinging its fist, a sentiment that bears similar connotations to the cultural projections and embodied memories referenced earlier. More importantly, as a suspended monument, *The Fist's* legacy rhetorically hangs over the city's present and future as well. In other words, *The Fist* does not embody memories of a particular time or fixed moment in Detroit's past, but instead operates as a lineage of defiant frameworks that defined the Detroit of before and will come to shape the Detroit in the future.

Mnemonic Endurance: Contingent Disruptions

The rhetorical and material presence of *The Fist* has several rhetorical implications on Detroit's future as it enters a period of uncertainty toward the future. In a time where some seem to believe that Detroit's decline has left the city as little more than a blank slate, *The Fist*

exists as an unwashable mark, challenging recent maneuvers of appropriation and mnemonic erasure to create a new Detroit. Here is where *The Fist*, unlike the other memory sites I have examined thus far, operates as a material source of memory that extends the legacy of any one event or episode. Whereas sites like the Ossian Sweet House, the 8 Mile Wall, and 12th Street are bound to their spatial or historical origins and the controversial episodes that occur thereafter, *The Fist* is a site detached from a singular context while operating as a palimpsest that remains unmovable in a sea of change. As *The Fist's* functions as a source of disruptive memory and embodied notions of resistance is rooted in events that precede it, the monument guards the city's past. Additionally the object reflects the cultural frameworks and the habitus of the city, and informs the discourses we see in slogan and tagline campaigns that have recently swept the city in response to twenty-first century revisions. Ultimately, the monument's defiant and decontextualized foundations function as a contingent rhetoric that disrupts and impedes attempts to naïvely build a Detroit unmarked by its past. *The Fist* is a rhetorical palimpsest that maintains a constant trace of the past even as an allegedly new Detroit is formed.

Detroit is an urban space where material objects like *The Fist* become informative fixtures of the cultural and social legacies that define its people. Tonkiss notes how webs of cultural associations attached to urban spaces are collectively derived social productions.⁷⁰ Her work echoes that of Henri Lefebvre, who illustrates how city spaces are themselves culturally maintained because they operate as representational spaces.⁷¹ These rhetorical spaces are especially significant in that they code our lived experiences, providing meaningful connections between everyday human encounters and our spatial environments. Therefore, for those who

associate urban spaces like Detroit with memories of “home,” this attachment strengthens attachment with those residents. To live within a city and affiliate one’s sense of self or identity to such as space is no trivial matter, since these relationships mutually define one another. But as urban spaces come to constitute the communities that inhabit them and vice versa, the constitutive relationship underwriting this connection is that of material sites like *The Fist*. That is, while city spaces remain open and incomplete social productions, the presence of memory sites anchors meaning to these spaces as well. For Detroit, *The Fist* stands as a visual fixture of a durable nature and combative strength residents celebrate as part of the city. Like the Ossian Sweet House, the 8-Mile Wall, and 12th Street, *The Fist* is emblematic of a legacy of resistance and cultural resilience that echoes across Detroit’s past, present, and future. In many ways, *The Fist* embodies a network of memory toward civil rights resistance that marks the city with a cultural framework that disrupts outside intervention. Where many urban sites across the country have been host to some of the nation’s most progressive civil rights accomplishments, Detroit is, at its core, defined by a defiant logic embodied through its people and monuments like *The Fist*. Because of the embodied memories permeated by the monument, efforts to erase, change or revise Detroit’s legacy must account for the resistant roots that inform the palimpsest foundations of Detroit.

Marked by Memory

Yet, these attempted revisions have emerged in the wake of the 2013 bankruptcy and subsequent redevelopment campaign through the stirrings of a New Detroit built upon the blank slate of ruins left behind in recent years. While *The Fist* is a centrally located and protected site of memory in the city’s downtown, other memorable sites, objects, and locations

are steadily demolished to make way for a new way of seeing Detroit. While that vision has yet to be seen, it certainly threatens to upend Detroit's legacy and the cultural frameworks tied to Detroiters' sense of community, their homes, and themselves. While narratives about the ongoing changes in the city embrace are colored with optimism, their consequence toward Detroit's definitive character threatens to erode the spirit of the city. Yet, this is not to say that all redevelopment or renewal projects are inherently problematic. But for Detroit, the grounds with which change is coming for the city is largely predicated on cleansing, removing, and wiping away the unwelcome marks of yesterday. In essence, redevelopment in Detroit is not simply a restoration project of particularized areas, but a widespread purge of the city's past to make way for a future that others wish to install upon the city space.

While a totalizing wash of the city's legacy may seem like the most effective method of stabilizing a foundation for a future Detroit, those directing these efforts will eventually confront an object that materially, visually, and symbolically fights back: *The Fist*. Because while several spaces throughout Detroit are vulnerable to the seemingly unstoppable purchasing power of incoming investors or public figures, *The Fist* marks the city and its people by a network of memory that disrupts these moves. As the monument generates a resistant cultural habitus and a distinctly combative public, these rhetorics shape the palimpsest frameworks for Detroit that cannot be undone. In other words, *The Fist* operates as one of the pillars that defines the identity of Detroiters and resists those looking to undermine the legacies that shaped Detroit's past. In all, the object prevents dominant forces from rewriting or transforming the city to their specific liking. Instead rhetorical productions rising from these

objects of memory build an opportunity for Detroiters to preserve their city's past and insert themselves in the direction for the Detroit's future.

Detroit, like any other city, is first and foremost an incomplete, open system where regular engagement and ceaseless changes mark it as a space forever unfinished but constantly changing.⁷² As such, our analysis of cities as public spaces should appreciate that no city ever reaches a plane of completion and, therefore, is threatened by the prospects of change on a regular basis. This is particularly true for the city of Detroit given the economic, physical, and social damage done to the city over time and the wide latitude the city has given developers to use public funds to change the cityscape and the identity of the city. Given these many changes within an always-incomplete urban project, how can urban residents remember their cities as sweeping changes erase and change their spatial and mnemonic landscape? One such method, I argue, is through artifacts like *The Fist* that challenge these changes and protect the past.

This chapter argues that material sites like *The Fist* operate to constantly mark the urban space in ways that resist erasure or forgetting and protect the presence of memory. It does so in two ways. First, *The Fist* anchors a host of cultural associations that extend beyond the statue's intended meanings. My analysis suggests that this site's visual elements and contextual detachment are what allow the monument to ascend from the meanings closely associated with boxing to an emblematic plane of defiant culture and steadfast pride that operates as the cultural ethos of Detroit. Second, *The Fist's* meaning is not arrested within the context of its 1986 revealing or the 2013 bankruptcy of the city, as noted by Gallagher and LaWare and Marback. Instead, the monument is a radically contingent force that constantly disrupts representations of the city, especially as the city faces a present and future that will

face a host of changes posed by redevelopment. Against entrepreneurial and institutional efforts to erase collective memories about the past and parts of the city's identity to begin anew with a blank slate, *The Fist* remains a constant obstruction, holding open a space for Detroiters to define themselves and the city as they wish.

Understanding public memory spaces as a palimpsest has significant implications for our understanding of material rhetoric and public memory. The idea of the palimpsest is derived from a Greek version of material where writing is effaced to create more space for future writings. However, the traces of past writings are constantly present in the material of the palimpsest. As a metaphor for how spaces where collective memories are contained and written on urban spaces, the palimpsest is apt for understanding modern city development and collective memory spaces.⁷³ While new development projects often attempt to erase the past to usher in the new, residual markings of the past remain. For Detroit, the palimpsest of the city space is found in the mnemonic echoes contained in sites of controversial history. In many ways, to hurriedly expunge the blemishes of our past is a futile exercise, because our present reality is always being marked by the past.⁷⁴ Thus, as we consider the optimism surrounding Detroit's recent revitalization and reflect on how these developments displace the past, we should examine how memory spaces operate to haunt these efforts with traces of the past. *The Fist* strikes through these attempts at erasure and reminds the city to be defiant.

I close this chapter by considering what the palimpsest means for the city's future. The mnemonic rhetoric contained in the material sites of the Ossian Sweet House, the 8-Mile Wall, 12th Street, and *The Fist* collectively constitute a collective memory about civil rights resistance as the ethos of the past and present city. However, I would like to look forward to speculate on

how these sites might affect the city's future. Detroit stands in an exigent moment where the past will play one of two critical roles for the Detroit of tomorrow. On the one hand, Detroit and the forces steering its changes may account for the past, learn from its follies, and use these memories as an informative fabric to revitalize a city in economic and racially progressive ways. On the other hand, the city may dismiss these lessons of the past and, as a result, damn themselves to similar self-destructive outbreaks of resistance that arise as civil rights injustice persists. *The Fist* not only disrupts attempts to erase and rearticulate the identity and memories of the city; it also serves as a warning to those who attempt to do so.

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Chapter 6 DETROIT, AN URBAN PALIMPSEST: A CONCLUSION

Detroit is only Detroit because of Detroiters. There are those who want to turn Detroit into a brand...they're seeking to commandeer the heart and soul of the city
-Monica Lewis-Patrick, Detroit Activist, 2015¹

Just as the auto companies reinvented the way they do business so will the city of Detroit. Once our challenges are behind us, the city ...will have a clean slate to operate...with a philosophy that works for its citizens. We are all in. Detroit's best days are ahead"
-Dan Gilbert, Owner and CEO of Quicken Loans, 2014²

On July 13, 2009, one of the America's largest real estate mortgage lending companies, Quicken Loans, formally announced it would be accelerating its relocation to Detroit's Compuware building at One Campus Martius, the heart of the city's downtown.³ For most cities, a company declaring its headquarters moving to their space would be noteworthy, but dismissed in a day or two. But for Detroit, Quicken Loans, and the man behind the real estate empire, news of the expedited 2010 move was not just another local news headline; it was only the beginning of a complicated operation by the company's CEO. At the helm of Quicken Loans is Detroit native Dan Gilbert, a white billionaire whose fortune is built on successful business venture and the profitability of issuing housing mortgages. In 1985, Gilbert launched his holding company, Rock Ventures LLC, which has continued to expand while the types of loans issued by lenders like Quicken lead to significant housing foreclosures and economic ruin. Yet, despite this business model, since moving Quicken Loans to the heart of Detroit, Gilbert has been at the forefront of the city's exhaustive campaign for renewal and redevelopment. For Gilbert, the primary problem facing the city is the issue of unused blighted spaces. Between abandoned homes, foreclosed communities, and decaying structures, Gilbert and his visionary taskforce, *Opportunity Detroit*, argue that blight is pulling Detroit deeper into the abyss.⁴ "Blight is like a

cancer,” Gilbert says, “It’s one of those all or nothing things...you need to remove it all, cut it out otherwise it continues to grow.”⁵ Following the city’s 2013 bankruptcy, Gilbert and his network of development companies have aggressively eradicated decay across the city, all the while assuring residents of the importance of his larger renewal strategy. According to Gilbert, he would “probably put [himself] in the top 1% in knowledge of blight in the city of Detroit.”⁶ This is no exaggeration, and from a policy and development perspective, Gilbert is quite knowledgeable on the subject given his line of work. However, despite his expertise and alleged altruistic desires to eliminate blight, Gilbert and his companies have gained control over much of the city and its future development.⁷ As a result, rapid economic development once again threatens residents’ futures and their understanding of their past as changes outpace public discussion of the nature and effect of these developments.

As this project has outlined so far, one of the largest issues affecting Detroit is the destruction of a sense of belonging and identity for Detroiters. For decades, black Detroiters courageously resisted discrimination and racism in a longstanding battle to carve out spaces of their own in Detroit to call home. Thus, an underlying question that arises out of my analysis is: how do we determine who belongs in the city of Detroit? And while Lefebvre contends that no city in its entirety belongs to any one group or community, in a city with an 83 percent black population, this systemic subjugation of black residents through stymied access to education, housing, and jobs is magnified by modern attempts that seize control over the city’s future away from the day-to-day Detroiters. Moreover, these demolished and condemned spaces strip the agency from residents to protect their community and the public memories of Detroit in particular areas of the city.⁸ In its present condition, some developers and artists describe

Detroit as a blank slate wiped clean for new development by decades of economic ruin and bankruptcy.⁹ And while the prospects of beginning anew may seem exciting or promising for urban planners or real estate titans like Gilbert, to approach the city as a blank slate ignores the sense of collective identity and public memories that shaped the Motor City in the first place. And no matter how much has been lost in the aftermath of events like the 2013 bankruptcy, these traces do not disappear; they are anchored to the city through vernacular memory sites that frame Detroit as a palimpsest. Yet, authority figures like Mayor Duggan, Gilbert, and various economic developers hold a seemingly unchecked authority to transform Detroit in ways that threaten to disrupt and further diminish these memories and the identities connected to them.

Dimensions of Detroit: Decline, Demolition, and Development

To better understand how new development and the memories of the past affect the future of Detroit, I return attention to Dan Gilbert and his company's presence in Detroit and its role in the economic decline of the city. The presence of Quicken Loans at the heart of Detroit and its recovery is troubling given its role in Detroit's decline. While I have referenced several cultural and political conditions polluted by racist ideology that undermined Detroit's prosperity, housing discrimination is by far one of the largest contributors. Most notably, limited housing opportunities for Detroit's black residents across time fashioned its presently blighted condition while also remaining one of the most segregated cities in the United States. Moreover, whereas the problems of Detroit's police forces and economic inaccessibility were in some ways addressed during Coleman Young's administration, housing issues were never completely mended. In 2017, for example, while Mayor Duggan was applauding the aggressive

moves to foreclose, demolish, and redevelop entire blocks of neighborhoods, families like those of Kevin Dickerson's were evicted, displaced, and left behind.¹⁰ Displacement and gentrification are not uncommon in redeveloping city spaces, but, as Bernadette Atuahene points out, Detroit's foreclosure controversy is not built on unfortunate circumstances, but injustice. Like the Dickerson's, hundreds of Detroit families have lost their homes as the city forecloses their properties for violating tax codes written in accordance with the same discriminatory housing frameworks that produced the 8 Mile Wall and ignited the Ossian Sweet incident.¹¹ Many of these tax codes escaped revision during the Young administration and, years after the passage of 1968 Fair Housing Act, the city turned its focus to a deluge of infrastructural problems until, eventually, the codes went unnoticed. While tax policies and enforcement are certainly a problem, a great deal of blame must be directed toward those responsible for the 2007 housing crisis. The fallout of the housing market collapse devastated Detroit after unstable subprime mortgage loans defaulted city-wide, many of which were under the purview of Quicken Loans and the network of real-estate figures now benefitting from the city's redevelopment.

While a large portion of United States was shaken by the recession following the 2007 housing collapse, the extremity with which Detroit declined lead many to wonder whether Detroit and similar rustbelt cities could survive. Several studies released since the recession reveals that Detroit was home to one of the largest concentrations of residents bound to subprime mortgage loans.¹² What makes these loans troublesome is that subprime mortgage loans are lending agreements meant to protect lenders through significantly higher interest rates and the flexibility of Adjusted Rate Mortgages (ARMs). The flexibility of ARMs is intended to compensate lending companies for taking on higher risk borrowers, allowing them to shift

interest rate percentages over the course of the loan.¹³ The subprime loans were a lynchpin in the 2007-housing crisis, since millions of home mortgages with higher interest rates were guaranteed to default. As such, the inflation in the housing market swelled until, eventually, the bubble popped, causing a chain reaction of bank failures, financial decline, and national recession. In the five years before the 2007 housing crisis, subprime lending rates were applied to 24 percent of national housing loans and 27 percent across the state of Michigan. During that same period, lenders in the city of Detroit wrote just over \$4 billion in high-risk subprime loans, which accounted for 68 percent of all city mortgages. In the ten years since the housing crisis, one in three properties, or 139,699 out of 384,672, have been foreclosed due to these mortgage defaults or heightened tax burdens.¹⁴

As a person who played a substantial role in the subprime mortgage crisis, Gilbert's concern about the blight cancer that he helped create is extremely troubling. *The Detroit News* found that five companies (Quicken Loans, Flagstar, Shore Mortgage, GMAC, and Worldwide Financial) held the vast majority of Detroit housing mortgages, noting the frequency with which these mortgages resulted in foreclose due to subprime lending. Three of these companies have since either declared bankruptcy or been absorbed through industry buyouts, and Quicken Loans, was highlighted for writing the most mortgage loans for city properties, 52 percent of which have since been foreclosed.¹⁵ Gilbert has denied any responsibility for his company's role in the crisis. Instead, he argued that oppressive tax systems and an unchecked history of social tension fractured the city.¹⁶ Despite federal data suggesting that his company regularly wrote loans at 3-5 percent higher than what the Federal Housing Administration defines as high-risk or subprime, Gilbert contends that vague definitions of what determines "subprime" absolve

his companies of any wrongdoing. Quicken Loans has since become the focus of a federal investigation into mortgage fraud between the years of 2007-2011. The investigation cites a host of violations under the False Claims Act, including falsifying income records to secure FHA funding, acts of real-estate manipulation, and illegally documenting credit scores or loan reports of prospective borrowers.¹⁷ According to the case filing:

The Government alleges that Quicken created a fraudulent scheme of knowingly representing certain FHA-insured mortgages had been underwritten with due diligence and were eligible for FHA insurance when, in fact, they were not...Quicken instituted and encouraged an underwriting process that led to employees disregarding FHA rules and falsely certifying compliance with underwriting requirements in order to reap the profits from FHA-insured mortgages...these violations were wide spread and systemic, and involved the knowing participation of the highest levels of Quicken management¹⁸

Quicken Loans motioned for the lawsuit to be dismissed on an array of technicalities. The appeal was denied in March 2017, and Gilbert has countersued the federal government while publicly likening the suit to “[a] hold up, a shakedown.. you’ve heard of gangsters, but this is govsters.”¹⁹

Despite this controversy, Gilbert and Quicken loans continues to play a prominent role in redeveloping Detroit. On February 7, 2018, Gilbert acquired The Comerica Bank building at 201 W. Fort Street in downtown Detroit, adding to his portfolio of well over 100 downtown properties that total in over 16 million square feet in functional space.²⁰ Moreover, as Gilbert’s companies Rock Ventures and Quicken Loans continue to churn out new possibilities for the city, lawmakers continue to surrender authority to the billionaire behind the scenes. In June 2017, for example, a piece of Michigan legislation dubbed the *Transformational Brownsfield Projects* bill narrowly passed into law. The statute allows developers to use special tax-capturing abilities for the purposes of development across the state of Michigan, but only if the

developers make an out-of-pocket investment of at least \$500 million and so long as the project is located in a site with a population over 600,000 people. For Michigan, only the city of Detroit fits the narrow population requirements for the law. And across the city, Gilbert's growing portfolio of property makes him one of the few individuals who can ever benefit from the bill. For Michigan Rep. Yousef Rabhi, the bill means one thing: "Its corporate welfare."²¹ For Gilbert, however, the bill means that his vision for Detroit no longer rests on his own out-of-pocket investments to develop billion dollar projects like the proposed Hudson site skyscraper or the planned major league soccer stadium. Instead, he has access to millions in tax dollars for transformational projects where profits will not funnel back to the state, but to Gilbert.²²

At Detroit's Core

While there is much to criticize about Gilbert and his company's mortgage policies, it would be unfair to ignore the many things he has done to benefit the city. Since 2011, Gilbert has invested more than \$2 billion of his own money to rebuild the city, and while most of the criticism levied against his investment plan is based on its selective focus on downtown and little elsewhere, it is important to remember that redevelopment can be a lengthy process and develop must start somewhere. One cannot deny that since Gilbert returned to Detroit and Quicken Loans relocation to Detroit in 2010, his mark on the city has brought, if nothing else, an influx of excitement and optimism. Yet, these maneuvers do not dismiss Gilbert or his company's involvement in the housing crisis and other problems created by his redevelopment vision. What is of most interest to my project is that Quicken Loans and Gilbert's empire has firmly secured itself in the spatial heart of downtown Detroit and the mode with which they have done so.

I opened this chapter with reference to Quicken Loans' relocation not to just move our focus to Dan Gilbert, but to identify another peculiar rhetorical site that is the presence of Quicken Loans at the city's epicenter. The move to Detroit for Quicken Loans in 2010 rather than 2012 took many by surprise, since the plans were well established for a gradual move over three years. In 2009, however, Quicken Loans was offered \$47 million in state tax breaks to relocate its headquarters from the Livonia suburb to downtown Detroit.²³ The offer mitigated almost all costs of the move for Gilbert and Quicken Loans while resituating the company in a city where opportunities were abundant for lending and investment. Many folks would look at Gilbert's expedited relocation to Detroit and label the decision as a business opportunity which, given the incentives, few would fault him for. But if we examine Quicken's current presence, the reasons for the 2010 relocation, and the ongoing federal investigation of the systemic subprime lending abuse that fueled Detroit's housing collapse, a disturbing connection emerges.

Recall the ongoing legal case against Gilbert and Quicken, which focuses on the concentration of subprime loans, allegedly fraudulent income, and credit report forgery committed by Quicken Loans against Detroit borrowers in the two years previous to its downtown relocation. While the case has yet to be resolved, several details have been revealed that directly relate to Quicken's 2010 relocation and Detroit's final stages of decline. The first revelation was that Quicken is alleged to have knowingly sold subprime mortgage loans that had minimal chance of success, despite Gilbert's argument of the contrary. A second significant detail is that many of these loans were sold from 2007-2009, which caused city properties to foreclose and diminished Detroit's property values. And finally, of the overall mortgaged

properties borrowed on during this period that would eventually foreclose, Quicken Loans was the source behind their FHA loans. Meaning that as Detroiters traverse their city's downtown and see Quicken Loans at its heart, they no longer only see a company headed by the man sweeping the city with change or progress. Instead, Detroit's heart is occupied by the organization responsible for a majority of the exploitative mortgages sold to susceptible residents who wanted to belong in a place they struggled so long to claim as home. Even worse, as the housing bubble burst and the cascade of Detroit mortgages defaulted between 2009-2011, Quicken's response was not to apologize or refund residents, but to move in front and center, at One Campus Martius. For a community decimated by the manipulative practices of real estate companies that affect people's ability to make Detroit their home, the presence of the company downtown is likely insulting.

I began this project with the aim to understand how humans use the presence of the past to ensure that the old adage of "history repeats itself" does not strike cities like Detroit, where history has taken a steep toll on the city. Detroit's civil rights struggle has been so punctuated that, for better or worse, the presence of the past not only exists in our socio-cultural interactions, but through physical mnemonic sites across the city. Regardless of whether these sites were built for commemorative aims such as *The Fist* or emerged like the Ossian Sweet House or the 8 Mile wall is irrelevant; these objects are markers of memory, signals of a contentious past that created the Detroit we see today. Moreover, Detroit is a city in transition, a city whose space is almost entirely under construction or redevelopment, compelling me to ask: how will the Detroit of the future look and which of these memories (if any) will guide it? In the midst of these transformations, oft-reported narratives of progress are

countered by generally overlooked effects of economic displacement. To that end, some critics regard the pains of foreclosure, demolition, and displacement as a natural progression of urban redevelopment, that revitalization of this scale requires difficult moments and some losses.²⁴ Others, however, argue that Detroit has experienced this before and that recent economic, political, and social changes celebrated as necessary for revival are the latest in a legacy of civil rights injustice to remind Detroit's black and non-white communities that their place in the city is along the margins.²⁵

At present, it is hard to determine how Detroit will look in ten or twenty years following Gilbert and Duggan's redevelopment campaigns or how Detroiters, old and new, will navigate the ugly facts that brought the city to where it stands today. Some Detroiters embrace Gilbert's effect on the city, with some going so far as to call the billionaire "Saint Gilbert."²⁶ Others remain skeptical, critical, and angry, arguing Gilbert is only serving himself and people like him, not Detroiters.²⁷ What revitalization and recovery for the city will look like remains uncertain for most Detroiters. However, one thing that seems certain is that Detroit residents have long endured struggles like this and Detroit will march on. As writer Maria Tomlinson argues:

The residents of this city are the hardest working people in the country. They are proud; they are blue-collar, and they will do anything it takes to make it just as grandiose as it was in the years of Motown. If you ever doubt what this city can do, take a moment to stand in front of that fist, and take it all in. There is no better way to represent the strength and determination of this city.²⁸

But Gilbert is not the only party who should consider the cultural projects and sentiment contained in iconic objects throughout the city like *The Fist* to understand the cultural dynamics at play for Detroit. Similar investors like Chris Illitch and Tom Gores or political figures like Mike Duggan and Rick Snyder would be wise in turning to these legacies to appreciate the legacy of

the city, and the tenacious response of its residents when they are wronged.²⁹ Public memories imbedded in sites like *The Fist*, the 8 Mile wall, or a house on Charlevoix offer clues as to how Detroiters respond when dominant figures decide to overwrite their own visions upon their city.

A better approach to redeveloping the city should include attempts to appreciate public memories of past struggles with economic and political inequality and the civil rights struggles that ensued. Vernacular memories of these contentious periods remain and are disruptive to attempts to recover. As De Certeau and Lefebvre maintain, city spaces belong to the people and no set of economic or political elites can assert total control over cities because of their dynamic, open, and transformative nature.³⁰ Thus, any attempt to develop Detroit should include a strategy to reconcile the past to allow for the community to move forward. The aim is not to erase the past, but to resolve or accept differences that remain, and to come to agreement on important revitalization priorities. Resident's grievances have been expressed for years and are present on memory sites like the 8 Mile wall. They also linger in the streets surrounding the Ossian Sweet House or Rosa Parks Boulevard. Further, troubling realities of displacement are expressed by residents affected by the new development. For instance, native Detroiter Jessica Gray argues, "[displacement] becomes a problem because, are we, the black people that are there, the Hispanic people that are there, are we not enough? As the people who have been pushing Detroit this whole time.... they're not helping the people they're pushing out."³¹ While these concerns exist and are easily accessible, there must be a commitment to listen to these concerns and engage in development with them in mind.

Many Detroit residents have remained during the good times and the bad, and the city itself is preserved in these residents and the collection of sites that capture a resistant ethos of Detroit. While Detroit and its people have been shaped by a checked mired by civil rights injustice, economic exploitation, and conflict, it is these legacies that make Detroit a space of exciting potential moving forward. For Aaron Foley, Detroit native, author, and official storyteller for the city, "Everyone has a place in Detroit... but there's a couple of things that happened in Detroit that just didn't happen elsewhere. To be part of that shapes a person into what they are."³² As such, for people looking to invest in Detroit's future or take part in the city's revival, the onus is on them to decide how they will use that past to guide or shape the vision they have for Detroit's future.

Emergent Memory Sites

For memory scholars, the presence of the past in public memory sites typically exists in order to meet some demand of the present. By their nature, societies are educated, informed, and produced by significant episodes in the past, which may then be concretized in public form to communicate to future generations a version of that history worthy of remembering. As such, sites of public memory impart a sense of significance to these historical moments they depict, as their singular image is a representation of a larger whole. For the sites of memory I investigated in this project, the pasts in question and the manner in which they are depicted in Detroit is distinct from typical commemorative sites like memorials or statues, since their emergence to memory sites occurs on a public level. In other words, whereas official spaces of public memory like the Lincoln Memorial or Civil Rights Museum are sanctioned by political bodies to represent an official version of history for the public, the memory sites in Detroit are

vernacular manifestations that are either formed through the agency to appropriate spaces, such as 8 Mile wall, or by an ethos of civil rights resistance, as seen with *The Fist*. As a result, Detroiters use these emergent sites of memory to cultivate a sense of belonging. But as their home is redeveloped and transformed, the past's function in these memory sites moves from a present functionality to a future utility. Perhaps what distinguished Detroit from other similar cities is that Detroit's history is defined by unflinching resiliency and determination to persevere despite the numerous challenges it faces. As Foley explains, "I'll tell you what Detroit is. We're a prideful people that love our city more than anything.... we're a people who make a way out of no way."³³ It is this ethos, forged from decades of struggles that will guide Detroit through the future. Those looking to transform Detroit and take part in its futures would be wise appreciate this history and the memories it entails.

Driving Detroit: Motors of Memory

The purpose of this project has been to focus on a city immersed in widespread change, Detroit, to determine how cities discursively cultivate the constitutive cultures that define the social framework that mark a city space and its people. Moreover, as the city is engrossed in a period of extreme redevelopment, this project focused on how sites across Detroit rhetorically impart constitutive cultural logics on residents and how they remain a fundamental feature for the community. I have argued that the nature of these constitutive rhetorics and their material manifestation in Detroit is grounded in episodes of civil rights resistance, captured and communicated through the presence of public memories. As these memory sites transform the people living in and around their presence, they also mark the spatial foundations for the city of Detroit, inscribing notions of civil rights resistance, collective agency, and public resiliency, traits

that now function as the framework of Detroit and its people. Several foundational questions about the nature of urban space, memory, and cultural rhetoric guided my study.

My first question explored the rhetorical means by which sites become locations of memory. I questioned how objects such as the Ossian Sweet House, the 8 Mile wall, and the void of what was once 12th Street become sites of memory. Moreover, my focus on the rhetorical origins of artifacts emerging with mnemonic value extended to a more traditional commemorative object, *The Fist*. Yet, even this traditional memory site had an emergent value and meaning as it shifted from commemoration of a boxing legacy into a source of defiant memory against racial discrimination as it guards against memory and identity erasure. My study revealed that, in each of these sites, what enables an object or site to become mnemonic is a triumvirate of factors: the object or site emerges out of controversy; is regularly engaged in the everyday and vernacular; and is constitutive of collective identity. This notion of incipient memory sites contributes to the study of public memory by extending the range of objects and places that can be studied. Additionally, it allows us to explore the understudied process of how sites become memory spaces; something that should be further explored in future scholarship.

Next, this project enquired how iconic images or performances rhetorically produce and sustain the cultural logics assigned to spaces like Detroit. In the instance of Detroit, these logics included traits of resilience, defiance, and toughness. My analysis throughout the project revealed that the resilient logics so often celebrated with the city are bound to the civil rights memory sites throughout the city. However, as noted in Chapter 5, the public memory and cultural logics produced through the embodied memory of *The Fist* illustrates how memory narratives may extend the contextual boundaries from which they come if the temporal

moment in which they are created allow for it. In other words, *The Fist's* genesis at a time where civil rights resistance in the city and across the nation enables the site to be informed by and represent cultural logics that are then embodied by the people of Detroit.

My third foundational question for this project queried how such spaces are socially defined and the connotations they carry as a result. I was especially intrigued by the notions of social spatiality because of Detroit's present reality as a space in transition and redevelopment. As this study progressed, I considered how Detroit has experienced a great deal in its urban history, from the challenges posed by the great migration to the exodus of white flight and de-industrialization. As such, a central interest of this project has been about how city spaces are socially constituted and the capacity for these spaces to retain their identity following dramatic change. Residents of Detroit often talk about the "heart and soul" of the city, which we associate with various cultural characteristics. Yet, as the city transforms in the coming years, I examined how well a city maintains its identity, and what allows it to persevere. My analysis demonstrated first that cities are regularly transformed and often realigned through their cultural connotations. Yet, these cultural connections are not simply erased and written over; the old memories and identities remain as constant traces that build as new inscriptions are added. Second, these connections are then sustained or preserved over time through historical etchings that echo the histories from which they came. I found the metaphor of palimpsest to be useful to theorize how this process operated. Understood as a palimpsest, the city of Detroit is forever marked by its past, regardless of redevelopment. As much as forces in the service of new development may try, the mnemonic anchors of the city's identity will constant resist forced efforts to start new without a critical reckoning with the city's past.

Lastly, I examined how the collective identity of the city changes and continues over time. I found that the city's unique connections to injustice and resistance have significantly shaped the identity of the city. For example, the contexts in which the 1925 Ossian Sweet Incident and 1967 Uprising happened reflected not only periods of heated tension, but significant swings in Detroit's population and demographic makeup. As these moments transformed the city and produced a range of consequences, Detroit's identity not only remained stable but also strengthened in their aftermath. Throughout this study, I argued that Detroit's past, as captured in sites of memory, is what has given shape to the city's identity. Thus, negotiation the legacy of the past is essential for the city's ongoing redevelopment.

Limitations and Future Study

This project contributed to the study of memory by examining how spaces of memory emerge and influence collective identity. While public memory studies have examined memory as a source of cultural origins, the field has understudied how mnemonic structures and spaces shape collective identities. There are several avenues in which we can expand this area of inquiry. As I discuss in Chapter Four, the role of public amnesia through forgetting the 1967 uprising provides a critical opportunity to study memories of revolt and the function of silence in instances of public commemoration. For nearly 50 years, no public commemoration, political remembrance, or city reflection was held for the uprising, which created a sort of emotional stasis as Detroiters worked to move forward while also being pulled to grieve over what they had lost. During my study, I assessed how acts of remembering through film, social media, and documentary film have overly narrowed our perceptives on the legacy of the events of 1967. Moreover, in the aftermath of the summer of 1967, the 1968 Kerner Report provides a very

ominous warning about the repetition of these acts of unrest if more attention is not given to the civil rights of black Americans, which parallels some of the grievances raised by today's Black Lives Matter protests. As we go forward, future study should examine traditional and sanctioned histories to explore how they describe the 1967 uprising and its surrounding contexts and episodes of injustice. Moreover, the odyssey of the 1967 uprising provides a substantial set of resistant texts that could offer fertile ground to examine memories of civic unrest and political response thereafter.

This study did not consider the role that gender and religion played in the remembrance of civil rights struggles. As a study focused on the connections between public memory and the social production of city space and culture, I did not explore the various ways in which women played a profound role in the civil rights struggle in Detroit, and how that role is overlooked or, in many ways, forgotten. Moreover, the city of Detroit and the larger civil rights struggle has been the historical backdrop for a confluence of tensions between Christian ideologies, the Nation of Islam, and other religious affiliations. For instance, Detroit, the home of the Nation of Islam, proved to be a site for disagreement between Christian and Muslim civil rights advocates. Future scholarship should explore how religious differences shaped recollections of the civil rights era.

Future research also should compare the memory of the civil rights struggle in the north compared to similar memories in the south. In Chapter One, I refer to the southern-centric dominant narrative of civil rights that often ignores northern tensions. In my study, I was unable to explore the mnemonic problems of northern civil rights exceptionalism. While extreme episodes of white racism occurred in the north, future work should explore how those

dynamics are remembered and in what ways our society attends to this problem. Moreover, studies could investigate how memory spaces commemorate Detroit and other northern cities as racially progressive and exceptional locations. Finally, future projects could examine the presence of the Quicken Loans office as a text to explore the company's relationship to housing inequality. While I explore some of this history in this chapter, an entire study could be conducted on this relationship and how it is framed in Detroit discourse. The issues raised in my study about spatiality, civil rights injustices, and cultural belonging can be further expanded in a study of Quicken Loans and Detroit's redevelopment.

Closing Thoughts: The Palimpsest Problematic & Possibility

My study of the rhetoric of memory and city spaces argued that the presence of critical mnemonic spaces in Detroit, where material vestiges of the city's past exist, articulate cultural connections to the city's past that shape the collective identity of the city. While Detroit is engaged in a period of change on many fronts, these mnemonic sites rhetorically mark it like an urban palimpsest that binds the city to its past, therefore countering any effort to strip the city of its legacy, its past, its memory. Ultimately, collective memory of the past has a profound impact on Detroit. Overall, this study illuminates the spatial consequences in the past's rhetorical function toward haunting, emerging, forgetting, and disruptive urban spaces as they engage in periods of change. This project hopes that subsequent scholarship will continue to explore memory's role as a constitutive source of cultural rhetoric, the rhetorical foundations by which public spaces are defined or realigned, and the rhetorical means by which the past shapes opportunities of change.

And yet, before closing, I would like to appeal to two matters tied to this larger project that convey the urgency and import of continued criticism of what is happening in Detroit. First, Rosa Parks once told us, “Racism is still with us. But it is up to us to prepare our children for what they have to meet, and, hopefully, we shall overcome.”³⁴ Her words reflect the importance of diligence, legacy, and remembering our past if we are to ever overcome the perils of racism. Parks’ words are especially relevant to the predicament facing Detroit because, less than ten years removed from bankruptcy of the city, redevelopment projects seem overwhelmingly appealing to many people, regardless of their cost. Second, in the aftermath of the Detroit uprising, an early version of the 1968 Kerner Report stated, “a truly revolutionary spirit has begun to take hold. An unwillingness to compromise or wait any longer, to risk death rather than have their people continue in a subordinate status.”³⁵ The Kerner Report, like James Baldwin’s 1963 *The Fire Next Time*, reminds us that, in cities like Detroit, the tendrils of racism must be constantly challenged if America hopes to move forward and avoid repeating our destructive history. The findings of my study and other scholarly examinations of race relations in Detroit point to a need to take serious the warnings of James Baldwin and the Kerner Commission. Failing to do so pushes our society and the city of Detroit steadily faster to future eruptions of civic unrest. However, if we engage the legacies of civil rights memory across Detroit as in other cities, we open the potential to restore these urban spaces through reconciliation and the critical modes of public forgetting or remembering that move us forward.

Notes

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⁴ David Segal, "A Missionary's Quest to Remake Motor City" (New York, NY: *The New York Times*, April 13, 2013)

⁵ Joe Guillen and Matt Helms, "Dan Gilbert testifies: Blight is like a cancer" (Detroit: *Detroit Free Press*, October 1, 2014)

⁶ Joe Guillen and Matt Helms, "Dan Gilbert testifies"

⁷ Ryan Felton, "What kind of track records do Quicken Loans and Dan Gilbert have in Detroit? Does anyone really care?" (*The Detroit Metro Times*, November 12 2014).

⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Spatial politics: Everyday life and the Right to the City*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

⁹ John Gallagher, "Is Detroit really a 'blank slate?' Depends on who you ask" (*The Detroit Free Press*, February 23, 2018)

¹⁰ Violet Ikonomova, Facing eviction, Detroit families get unprecedented chance to save their Homes. (Detroit: *The Metro Times* October 27, 2017); see also Violet Ikonomova, "Nearly 36,000 Detroit properties foreclosed ahead of 2018 tax auction. (*The Detroit Metro Times*, December 15, 2017). Retrieved from: <https://www.metrotimes.com/news-hits/archives/2017/10/27/facing-eviction-detroit-families-get-unprecedented-chance-to-save-their-homes> & <https://www.metrotimes.com/news-hits/archives/2017/12/14/nearly-36000-detroit-properties-foreclosed-ahead-of-2018-tax-auction>

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¹² Christine MacDonald and Joel Kurth, "Foreclosures fuel Detroit blight, cost city \$500 million" (Detroit, MI: *The Detroit News*, January 2015); see Joel Kurth, "5 Michigan Firms Tied to Most Detroit Foreclosures" (Detroit, MI: *The Detroit News*, January 2017); David Coates, "Detroit Foreclosure crisis was a team effort" (Detroit, MI: *The Detroit News*, July 2015);

¹³ Justin Pritchard, "Learn the pros and cons of Adjustable Rate Mortgages" (*The Balance*, November 7, 2017) Retrieved: <https://www.thebalance.com/adjustable-rate-mortgages-315667>

¹⁴ Christine MacDonald and Joel Kurth, "Foreclosures fuel Detroit blight"

¹⁵ Joel Kurth, "5 Michigan Firms"

¹⁶ JC Reindl, "Gilbert Fires Back at Feds Over Loan Allegations" (Detroit: *The Detroit Free Press*, April 24, 2015)

¹⁷ John Gallagher, "Dan Gilbert Vows He Will Never Settle Department of Justice Lawsuit" (Detroit, MI: *The Detroit Free Press*, January 19, 2018)

¹⁸ Judge Mark A Goldsmith, "The United States of America v. Quicken Loans Inc.: Decision on motion for dismissal 03-09-07" (Detroit, MI: United States District Court, March 2017), retrieved from: https://www.scribd.com/document/341425998/Quicken-Loans-Decision-03-09-17#download&from_embed

¹⁹ John Gallagher, "Dan Gilbert Vows"

²⁰ Dana Afana, "Dan Gilbert Buys Downtown Detroit Comerica bank building" (MLive: February 7, 2018) Retrieved from: http://www.mlive.com/news/detroit/index.ssf/2018/02/dan_gilbert_buys_downtown_detr.html

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²² Shikha Dalmia, "The Dark side of Detroit's Renaissance" (*The Week*: April 27, 2017) Retrieved from: <http://theweek.com/articles/692770/dark-side-detroits-renaissance>

²³ Amy Lane, "Quicken Loans' move tops list of tax incentives approved by MEGA board" (Detroit: *Crain's Detroit Business*, July 21, 2009)

²⁴ Jessica Leigh Hester, "Growing pains for Detroit's Urban Farms" (City Lab: August 30, 2016) Retrieved: <https://www.citylab.com/life/2016/08/land-use-detroit-development-urban-farms/497030/>

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- ²⁷ Shikha Dalmia, "The Dark side"
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- ³⁰ Michel De Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984); Henri Lefebvre, "Spatial politics"
- ³¹ Maria Robins-Somerville, "The New* Detroit"
- ³² Aaron Foley, "*The Detroit Neighborhood Guidebook*" (Detroit: Belt Publishing, 2017); Georgea Kovanis, "Detroit's First Chief Storyteller says city's narrative must be diverse, inclusive" (Detroit: *The Detroit Free Press*, August 2017)
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ABSTRACT**CONSTITUTIVE MEMORIES OF CITY SPACE: RHETORICS OF CIVIL RIGHTS
MEMORY IN DETROIT'S URBAN LANDSCAPE**

by

SCOTT A. MITCHELL**August 2018****Advisor:** Dr. Kelly M. Young**Major:** Communication**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation examines public memories of civil rights injustice and resistance as constitutive rhetorics of urban culture and spatiality for the city of Detroit. By studying the city of Detroit as it navigates an ongoing period of dramatic change and redevelopment, this study demonstrates how material manifestations of memory become the constitutive forces that define what many describe as "Detroit's heart and soul." This project illustrates the embedded cultural logics produced from sites of public memory, thereby arguing city spaces as locations bound to their legacies and beholden to material and symbolic consequences of their past. This dissertation proceeds through four analytical focuses on memory sites in Detroit, demonstrating the mnemonic features of haunting memory, emergent memory, forgetting, and disruptive memory that mold the city space as a whole. While previous scholarship on the relationship between memory, rhetoric, and cities introduces the network of mnemonic narratives that produce our singular ideological frameworks, they fail to extend such conclusions to complicated cultural amalgamations, such as city spaces and the cultures that define them. This dissertation closes with a look to Detroit's future and an extended conclusion

detailing the cautions that Detroit's public memories of the civil rights struggle suggest, particularly in the context of ongoing controversies in contemporary Detroit. From the cases explored across this project, the author argues Detroit and city spaces like it are a social, assemblage of cultural palimpsests, spaces bound to public memories that continue to shape, inform, and influence the manner in which these locations move forward.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Scott A. Mitchell's research rests at the intersection of Rhetorical Studies, Critical/Cultural Studies, and Memory Studies, with an emphasis on subjects of public culture and memory. He was born in the city of Chicago and raised in the surrounding Chicago land area, but will now move on to the state of Wisconsin, where he has accepted an Assistant Professorship position at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in the Communication and Media Studies Department.

Scott received his Bachelor of Science in 2012 from Illinois State University, majoring in Communication Studies while minoring in English Literature. Following his undergraduate education, he remained at Illinois State for his Master of Science degree, which he earned in 2014 under the advisement of Joseph Zompetti. Scott's Master's Thesis, "Hegemonic Resistance in Hip-Hop," examined how hip-hop music elicits opportunities for publics to resist or expose oppressive racial discourses, with a primary focus on the work of Tupac Shakur. Following his graduate work at Illinois State, Scott went on to Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan for his doctoral studies in Communication, with an emphasis in Rhetorical Studies under the advisement and mentorship of Kelly Young. During his time at Wayne State University, Scott served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant and Assistant Course Director before earning his doctoral candidacy in 2017. As the Thomas C. Rumble Research Fellow from 2017-2018, Scott completed his Ph.D. with a dissertation on constitutive memories of urban spaces, a project on the city of Detroit and public memories during a period of redevelopment. In addition to his larger project on Detroit, Scott's research program focuses on the rhetorical frameworks of memory studies across subjects in city spaces, public culture, and citizenship.