CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Nowhere To Run To:
The Duality of the Black Experience in Detroit
During and After the Civil Rights Movement

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in History

By

Sherwin Keith Rice

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The thesis of Sherwin Keith Rice is approved:

_____________________________________          ___________________
Dr. Patricia I. Juarez-Dappe

_____________________________________          ___________________
Dr. Joshua A. Sides

_____________________________________          ___________________
Dr. Thomas W. Devine, Chair

California State University, Northridge
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The Civil Rights Movement refers to the mid-twentieth century struggle by African Americans to obtain their rights as citizens of the United States. It is typically viewed as a movement aimed at fighting segregation and protecting the voting rights of African Americans in the southern states. However, segregation and discriminatory practices did not occur solely in the South. Although many perceived the North as being more accepting of African Americans in general, race relations there were very complex. African Americans in northern cities were subjected to segregation and discrimination in their private lives and in the workplace before, during, and after the civil rights movement.

Drawing on both primary and secondary sources, this study recounts how African Americans citizens outside of the south were denied equal access to both employment and housing. Using Detroit, Michigan as a model for northern cities, it reveals the consequences such actions had on the black community. For example, blacks were restricted to living within areas abandoned by whites, thereby creating a class of people that was denied upward mobility because of the color of their skin. Segregation and discrimination problems developed in Detroit as early as 1863 in the wake of President
Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, reflecting a fear among whites who thought they would lose their jobs to ex-slaves. Although many industrialized cities attracted laborers from throughout the country and the world, blacks born in the United States were overwhelmingly denied opportunities in the workplace which could lead to better opportunities in their private lives.

Detroit provided one of the best alternatives for employment to blacks with little or no education living under Jim Crow laws in the South. Therefore, during the first half of the twentieth century, thousands of blacks migrated to Detroit to work in the automobile and steel factories. Unbeknownst to them, northern cities were not unlike their southern counterparts. Throughout the twentieth century blacks in Detroit became quite familiar with the similarities between the two regions.

To understand how treatment similar to what blacks received in the South affected them in the North, chapter one describes how and why racist policies developed in Detroit. The second chapter examines the nature of workplace discrimination through a class-action lawsuit against the Detroit Edison Company and supplements the analysis with several oral history interviews. The third and final chapter examines the nature of housing discrimination in the Detroit area through a class action lawsuit against the city of Hamtramck, the defeat of an open housing bill in Detroit, and the eruption of violence in the city of Dearborn over the possibility of integration. This study hopes to explain how some of the problems that plagued the African American community during and after the Civil Rights movement are based on employment and housing discrimination practices born out of a direct link to the institution of slavery.
I. Introduction

In November of 1985 I moved back to my hometown of Detroit, Michigan because my first wife had to care for her ailing grandmother. It was eighteen months of dealing with death; some expected, but most not. In 1986 we both lost our grandmothers, but that summer I also lost my hero, my older brother Arthur Rice Jr. (June). Those who have been rescued from the neighborhood bully by an older sibling will understand. He was everything I wanted to be: tall, dark like chocolate, and smart. School was never a problem for him. He graduated from high school a year early, started working, and entered engineering school. By 1970 he was commuting to the suburb of Warren, Michigan, working at General Motors under notable “automotive whiz kid” John DeLorean.¹ June had accomplished a number of achievements, but he could not avoid the drugs and crime that consumed Detroit.

Like many young African Americans in Detroit, June should have reaped some benefits from the Civil Rights Movement, but he did not. Those with ambition were forced to share the inner city with the ambitionless. Some survived and some did not. For the next twenty years June survived. He worked for General Motors, Ford Motor Company, and even for Hughes Aircraft in California. He also committed armed robberies and burglaries, and no telling what else to support his drug habit. As a result of his street-life, he also spent time in-and-out of jail. He could go to work in the suburbs in the morning, then take a lunch break to go to the city to do a “B & E” (breaking and

¹ John Zachary DeLorean (January 6, 1925 – March 19, 2005) was an American engineer and executive in the U.S. automobile industry, most notably with General Motors, and founder of the DeLorean Motor Company.
entering) with his fellow junkies. June’s life represented an extreme example of the duality of the black experience in the post-civil rights era.

An addict’s life ends one of two ways: quietly, perhaps even peacefully (at the end of a needle), or very violently (the result of a criminal act). On June 22, 1986, June’s life came to a violent end. He had accused one of his fellow drug addicts of drinking his cheap two-dollar bottle of Mogen David 20/20 wine. When he turned to cross the street, the addict’s girlfriend who was also a junkie, stabbed him in the back. Most of the people who traveled in that circle were uneducated dropouts. I think they relished having June down on their level. This time they brought him all the way down; he died right there in the street.

I think my being ten years younger than June made a significant difference in the way our lives turned out. I never felt that I could live up to being as smart as him in school or in the streets. However, I was able to observe and learn from the mistakes of the black men in his age group. Prior to moving to Los Angeles in 1981, I had become involved in the street-life of Detroit. Two events changed the direction of my life. First, as I watched a female junkie inject herself in the eyelid with heroin, I had a moment of curiosity about the attraction of this drug, which one addict said, “makes me feel like a king on a throne.” Second, I used to hate the bi-weekly pilgrimages forced on me by my mother to visit June whenever he was in jail. So when I spent my one and only night in jail I realized how much I loved my freedom. I knew if I became comfortable with that life, I would be trapped. Fortunately I did not have the burden of being in the first group of African Americans who should have benefited from the Civil Rights movement. But I think I learned to make better decisions based on the pain they experienced. Hopefully
future generations of oppressed people will be able to identify and oppose methods used to enforce segregation and discrimination.

When Marvin Gaye wrote the following lyrics in 1971, he was asking the question expressed in the song’s title, *What’s Going On:*

Mother, mother
There's too many of you crying
Brother, brother, brother
There's far too many of you dying
You know we've got to find a way
To bring some lovin' here today – Ya²

History has taught me that sometimes we are very small contributors to the events that make up our lives. Unfortunately, Marvin Gaye, June, and generations of young African Americans have not been exposed to the history that would answer that question. The answer begins with the discrimination blacks encountered in two major areas: employment and housing. Trying to determine which one had the more negative impact on the African American community is similar to asking which came first the chicken or the egg? Close examination of both types of discrimination provides some answers to Gaye’s question, “What’s Going On?”

Not unlike many whites, I have wondered why do so many African Americans continue to languish in inner-city poverty and fail to do better for themselves, and why do many blacks who have done better not move on? I asked these questions in spite of

having been one of the people I question, which now sounds absolutely crazy to me.

Many of the questions I wondered about before have been answered through my research for this study. But more than answer questions, I hope this paper can foster dialogue about one particular question that some whites ask: why do blacks continue to blame slavery and Jim Crow for their problems? They think that because they happened so long ago that they are no longer valid excuses; but it is not nearly so simple. And now that we have the first bi-racial President, many may think the case should surely be closed on racism, segregation, and discrimination. This is comparable to saying that after Brown v. Board all African Americans had the chance to receive the same educational experience as whites, which we know is not true.

During the twentieth-century many whites in America’s northern cities exerted as much as, or more control over the lives of African Americans as did whites in the South. Blacks migrated north for jobs, and to live without the racism, segregation, and oppression so ingrained in southern states. As an African American who grew up in Detroit, Michigan in the 1960s and ’70s, neither the atmosphere nor the conversations I overheard from a cross-section of blacks supported what Americans were led to believe about northern cities. Until very recently, I was still convinced that the racial incidents encountered by myself, friends, and family members were isolated cases, perpetrated by individuals clinging to a bygone era of racism. Unknown to many Americans, while the civil rights movement was transforming the South during the 1960s, conditions were not much different above the Mason-Dixon Line.

The truth is, African Americans have never been able to escape the racial prejudices of American society in the North, South, East, or Western United States. They
just encounter them in different forms. America originated as a society created solely to enrich the lives of European colonists and their descendants. The lives of African slaves and their descendants were the fuel for the colonies’ economic engine. The people enriched by the oppression of others do not necessarily disregard their so-called entitlements because of their geographical location. In some cases, different levels of government helped to further white control over the economic and social realities of African American citizens.

Unfortunately for the African American people of North America, they have been living in a disadvantaged state since the ratification of the Constitution, the first of many legal documents to diminish the citizenship and rights of blacks. It states:

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.\(^3\)

Fortunately, in the aftermath of the Civil War, the Constitution was amended to address black suffrage specifically. Amendment 15, Section 1 states, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”\(^4\) The characterization of African Americans as three-fifths of a person had been previously addressed in the 14\(^{th}\) Amendment, Section 1. Although the 15\(^{th}\) Amendment was ratified in 1870, it took one hundred years for African Americans to participate fully in the voting process. Their living under such restrictions begs the question: is it better to live under total

\(^3\) U.S. Constitution, art. 1, sec. 2. Three fifths of all other Persons meaning black slaves.

\(^4\) U.S. Constitution, amend. 15, sec. 1
unquestionable oppression (slavery) or under the illusion of having rights due all citizens? Even after slavery ended and well into the twentieth century, this may have been a question many African Americans who experienced the inequalities of living while black in America posed.

Given support among some whites for the abolition of slavery in the North, one might assume that that would result in better race relations. Unfortunately, this was not the case. And the consequences of those underdeveloped relationships have had a devastating effect on the black community throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. After the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the city of Detroit was engulfed in an outbreak of racial violence based on whites’ fear of unemployment, but brought to a head as the result of other circumstances. Although the purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of the civil rights movement, if any, on the socioeconomic conditions of blacks in the North, it is impossible to begin in the twentieth century. At no time in history has a major event such as a revolution resulted solely from the events or actions of the immediate preceding years. The sources examined for this study suggest that the conditions that existed in the post civil rights era are the culmination of many experiences over many decades.

For the sake of this study it is not necessary to examine southern slavery and its direct relationship or effect on African Americans living in Northern cities. The sentiments of the white laboring class in Detroit towards African Americans in 1863 reveals the genesis of the problems for blacks. These sentiments are reinforced in the *Free Press*. The rhetoric published in the *Free Press* created a cycle that played on the fears of the white working class. The newspaper was founded in 1853 on the principles
of its owner, Wilber F. Storey. Justin Walsh explains the most important democratic value according to Storey: “First, racism. Underlying all of Storey’s other convictions was the certitude that the Anglo Saxon race was ordained by the Almighty to spread the blessings of American liberty to all in the Western Hemisphere except Negroes.” Storey left the newspaper in 1861 but his legacy remained. The *Free Press* ran articles before and after the Emancipation Proclamation that may have contributed to Detroit’s first race riot. On the surface, the race riot resulted from the alleged sexual transgressions of one Thomas Faulkner against a young white girl. According to the March 6, 1863 edition of the *Free Press*, “Yesterday was the bloodiest day that ever dawned upon Detroit… the minds of the men … around the City Hall in the forenoon were bent on murderous mischief. They were resolved that the Negro, Faulkner should forfeit his life at their hands, be his verdict and sentence what it might.” Faulkner was sentenced to life in prison. But what makes the case and the ensuing riot unusual is the ambiguity of Faulkner’s race. An anonymous witness to the riot published an account of the event. The witness notes:

Thomas Faulkner, charged of committing the outrages upon Ellen Hover, a colored girl and also a white girl, was to all intents a white man. This is beyond doubt, for he was a regular voter, and the journals of the city that understood his politics state that he voted the Democratic ticket. And an old veteran of over one hundred years of age declares, that in conversing with F. he said: "If he thought he had one drop of colored blood in his veins, if he could, he would let it out." And this was the man that caused the mob on colored men!”

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7 Academic Affairs Library, UNC-University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, “A Thrilling Narrative From the Lips of the Sufferers of the Late Detroit Riot, March 6, 1863, with the Hair breadth Escapes of Men, Women and Children, and Destruction of Colored Men's Property, Not Less Than $15,000,” [http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/detroit/detroit.html](http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/detroit/detroit.html), This account appears to have been written by an African
In the same edition that the *Free Press* refers to Faulkner as a Negro it also states, “Faulkner is forty-two years of age, of medium size, and has apparently but a trifle of negro blood in his veins.” Nevertheless the *Free Press* caused tensions to rise through other articles in the months prior to the riot.

Although the *Free Press* ran articles supporting white supremacy, black citizenship, the war and black inferiority, the articles on labor had the desired effect. The article on Governor Blair’s support of equality for African Americans may have caused white laborers some anxieties. The article states that the governor wants “to admit the blacks to the elective franchise… to admit negroes in unlimited numbers in to the State…to make them competitors with the whites in all kinds of labor….” Confronted with the possibility of ex-slaves flooding Detroit and working for lower wages than whites, the *Free Press* spoke directly to, and for the white laborer:

If we may ask, what would become of the white race during the process of giving ‘time and opportunity’ to the blacks?... The negro on this continent belongs to the Southern States. His *chance* is there. Why *must* the North assume his interests, endow him with privileges and invite his presence? We have not enslaved them. They are as distinct from us politically and socially as the cannibals or Chinese are.

Absolving the North of any responsibility for slavery could have confined ex-slaves to the South, preventing cheap black laborers from migrating to the North. However, neither the views of a newspaper or the fears of white laborers would prevent the

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American and quotes only African American victims of the mob. The quote was taken from the author’s interview with the victim, M. Dale.


eventual migration of blacks to the North.

The Northern migration of blacks increased during and after World War I, which created a backlash on the part of native-born whites and immigrants alike. White native-born Americans had been protesting the immigration of their European brothers since the 1840s.\(^\text{11}\) During the early 1920s the cities became a point of condemnation for some whites. Native-born whites became upset with the cultural expressions of immigrants and blacks pervading the cities.\(^\text{12}\) Concerns over the wave of Southern and Eastern Europeans in the United States led to the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924. The law limited the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 2 percent of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States in 1890, down from the 3 percent cap set by the Immigration Restriction Act of 1921, according to the Census of 1890. These same measures could not be used to stop the movement of African Americans within the country. Therefore, native-born whites incorporated another plan for northern cities growing population of African Americans.

Prior to the Great War, it was not uncommon for blacks and whites to live in racially mixed neighborhoods. As more blacks moved north, segregation increased. According to Boyle, “Where whites had once talked bravely of racial justice, they now whispered of Negro workers stealing white men’s jobs and colored rapists ravaging white women.”\(^\text{13}\) Creating barriers between the living spaces of blacks and whites would insure


\(^{\text{12}}\) Boyle, 6.

\(^{\text{13}}\) Boyle, 78
that the relationships that could lead to job opportunities would not develop between blacks and whites. The population in Detroit was divided into sectors based on income, ethnicity, class, and race. However, for every group except blacks these labels were changeable or removable, or ignorable. In almost a mirror image of modern Detroit, in 1925 blacks and poor immigrants occupied the inner ring of the city. At that time the inner city was located closer to the industrial grime the burgeoning auto industry had created. Thomas Sugrue states:

The barriers that kept blacks confined to racially isolated, deteriorating, inner-city neighborhoods were largely invisible to white Detroiter. To the majority of untutored white observers, visible poverty, overcrowding, and deteriorating houses were signs of individual moral deficiencies, not manifestations of structural inequalities.14

The more a worker made and the higher his position, so increased his distance away from the factories, with the auto moguls farthest removed from the source of their wealth.

There was also a division amongst Europeans.15 On the west side lived native-born Americans with immigrants on the east. This system of division made it inevitable that the mob mentality that accompanied white fear in 1863 would be revisited upon African American citizens of Detroit in the twentieth century.

The management of real estate by whites in the North proved to be an effective measure of containment, but some blacks seeking to improve their surroundings slipped through the cracks with disastrous results. As native whites, and immigrants’ financial positions improved, they moved further away from the interior of the city without resistance. For African Americans, doing so could mean this was putting one’s life in the


15 Sugrue, 15.
hands of whites, who at the time, were heavily influenced by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).

According to Kevin Boyle, “The KKK had started recruiting in Detroit in 1921, and since then, their poison had seeped into almost every corner of the city.” In spite of this, a few brave black souls attempted to move away from the core of the city. One of those souls, Dr. Alexander Turner, proved that the mark of race could not override the intelligence, class, or respect acquired by a black man, even in the North.

Early in the twentieth century Dr. Turner experienced the duality of black life in the North. Successful in every meaning of the word, he moved easily between the black ghetto and the white world. That is, until he tried to move closer to the white world on a permanent basis, in the summer of 1925. Boyle notes:

The highly skilled chief of surgery at the colored hospital, Dunbar Memorial, Turner also held appointments at two major white hospitals, both of which barred most black doctors. But none of it meant a thing in June, when the doctor moved into a beautiful home on Spokane Avenue, in an all-white area of Detroit’s west side. He had been inside only five hours when a white mob attacked, smashing windows, ripping the phone line, tearing tiles off the roof. Amid the terror, a small group of white men had arrived, claiming to be representatives from the office of Mayor Johnny Smith, an ally of the black community. When the doctor opened the door, thirty or forty members of the mob rushed in to ransack the place. Turner barely escaped, cowering on the floor of his Lincoln sedan as the chauffeur inched the car through the snarling, screaming hecklers. That night, shocked and humiliated, Turner signed the deed for the house over to the neighborhood improvement society that had whipped the crowd into its frenzy.

This was not an uncommon scene in Detroit where the boundaries for blacks had been clearly established. This was one of five attacks on blacks who had bought homes in white areas that summer. But near the end of that summer one of Dr. Turner’s colleagues would not be intimidated by mob violence.

16 Boyle, 24.

17 Boyle, 24-25.
Dr. Ossian Sweet had listened to Turner recall the events of the day he tried to take possession of his new home, and decided to move ahead with his purchase of a home on Garland Avenue, on Detroit’s east side. Dr. Ossian Sweet—the oldest of ten children—was raised in Barstow, Florida, attended segregated Wilberforce College in Ohio and then earned his medical degree from Howard University. Raised in the South, Sweet was quite familiar with the brutality that whites could resort to. However, his wife Gladys, a native of Detroit had grown up in white neighborhoods. According to Boyle:

In fact, she was almost white herself. Her mother’s father was a white man. And Gladys had such light, almost olive, skin she just might have been able to pass, had she been so inclined. There was simply no way she could understand the sangers that might await her on Garland, not the way Ossian understood them.18

Like her husband she refused to be intimidated. These were proud and educated African Americans who refused to be corralled into sections of black areas of Detroit such as Paradise Valley or Black Bottom, where housing was substandard and prices inflated. Had Dr. Sweet and his wife been native-born white or immigrants, the house on Garland and the surrounding neighborhood would have been beneath his station in life.

Whites’ fear of blacks sharing the same living space was relatively new, but found support in local institutions. In order to preserve the aesthetic character of some neighborhoods developers incorporated zoning laws into deeds. Prior to the 1920s, developers in other cities such as Chicago had also used restrictions to give areas a certain racial character. But according to Boyle, “that wasn’t common practice in Detroit until the early 1920s, when suddenly developers blanketed the new houses on the city’s outskirts with restrictive covenants, a practice they turned into a selling point.”19

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18 Ibid.

19 Boyle, 144.
1924 real estate agents were barred by their trade groups from showing black customers homes in white neighborhoods. Moreover, housing appraisers downgraded the value of any neighborhood with even a single black resident. Therefore, even wealthy blacks who could afford homes could not get mortgages, because their presence would instantly bring down the value of the property in the neighborhood.

Unfortunately, Dr. Sweet thought he had found a crack in the wall that white Detoniers were building to keep his kind out. The owners of the house on Garland, Ed and Marie Smith, were thought to be a white couple. But in reality Ed was a light-skinned black man who had been passing as white. Passing as white allowed him to build a successful real estate business. Having no vested interest in keeping the neighborhood white, Smith sold Dr. Sweet the house for a bigger profit than he could make from a white buyer. He also could afford to provide Dr. Sweet with financing thereby avoiding the need for a mortgage. In June of 1925 Dr. Sweet purchased the bungalow at 2905 Garland Avenue.

The American dream immediately turned into a nightmare for Dr. Sweet. Before the Sweets had moved their belongings in on September 8, 1925, fear driven by local realtors greed had crept into the neighborhood. Real estate agents could induce panic and fear, and make big profits selling homes to blacks in white neighborhoods at inflated rates. Meanwhile, they made still more profits directing whites to newer neighborhoods. Although a crowd of a couple of hundred people gathered across the street from the bungalow, the Sweets’ first night on Garland proved uneventful. However, the next day a phone call to Gladys from Edna Butler foreshadowed coming

\footnote{Boyle, 147.}
events. During that call Butler recalled what she heard on the streetcar earlier. She overheard the streetcar driver and a white woman discussing the previous night’s disturbance on Garland. “Some niggers’ had moved in and we’re going to get rid of them,” the white woman had said. “They stayed there last night but they will be put out tonight.”

The Sweets were prepared on the second night when a much larger crowd formed. Unlike Dr. Turner, Dr. Sweet enlisted the help of his brothers and friends to defend his family and home against the mob. On the night of September 9, 1925 as the crowd became agitated, Otis Sweet (Dr. Sweet’s brother) and William Davis arrived to help Ossian defend his property. As Boyle recounts, Dr. Sweet, encountered upon making his way to unlock the front door:

the scene he’d dreaded all his life, the moment when he stood facing a sea of white faces made grotesque by unreasoned, unrestrained hate for his race, for his people, for him…. Otis and William Davis were standing right in front of Ossian on the porch, terror-struck. The people on the other side of the street were screaming, “Here’s niggers!” “There they go!” “Get them! Get them!” Stones were raining down from across the street, smashing into the lawn, crashing onto the painted wooden floor of the porch, and skittering under the swing…Senseless with fear, Ossian stood alongside Gladys and Davis in the dining room as more rocks slammed off the roof and walls…. “What shall I do?” “Don’t do anything Davis replied. “Just take you time and give the police officers a chance.”… A few minutes passed. Another second-story window shattered; the house was filled with the sound of splintering glass hitting the floor upstairs. Then came the deafening roar of gunshots from the bedrooms above, a moment’s pause, and another volley as fierce as the first.

21 Gladys Sweet statement to police as quoted in Boyle, 32.

22 “The Dr. Sweet Case: Race Psychology Told in Sweet’s Testimony,” Detroit Free Press, November 19, 1925, “Dr. Sweet Goes on Stand,” Otis Sweet Statement to police, September 9, 1925, Davis statement to police, Otis Sweet oral history, Ossian Sweet statement to W. Hayes McKinney, September 12, 1925 frame 924, reel 2 part 5 NAACP Papers, Hays opening statement, Ossian and Otis Sweet statements to police, Davis statements to police September 9 and 10, 1925, Race Psychology Told in Sweet’s Testimony,” Sweet Depicts Fear in Court as quoted in Arc of Justice, 36-37.
When the shooting subsided, Eric Houghberg had been struck in the leg and Leon Breiner lay dying in the street. Once again mob violence in Detroit had resulted in the tragic loss of life. Clarence Darrow successfully defended the occupants of 2905 Garland who were found innocent of murder.23 It is possible that these events would result in the tragedy that would become the life of Dr. Sweet. Dr. Sweet did not move into the house on Garland until 1928. During that time Sweet lost both his two-year old daughter Iva and Gladys to tuberculosis, which in her case may have been contracted during her incarceration at Wayne County Jail, after the shooting.24 Although Dr. Sweet prospered financially for a while, his finances were in disarray when he paid off the bungalow in 1958. Thirty-two years after purchasing the bungalow to avoid life in the ghetto, Dr. Sweet sold his home in the still largely white neighborhood to a black migrant family. Dr. Sweet moved into an apartment in his office in the very ghetto he attempted to escape where friends saw him grow increasingly bitter. And just as the Civil Rights Movement was developing momentum in the South, Dr. Sweet put a bullet in his brain on March 20, 1960.

Most people in this country do not understand how it feels to do everything according to society’s expectations, only to be rejected based solely on the color of one’s skin. It is even more painful when their collective contributions to society have penetrated every corner of American life, but have never been celebrated. On the contrary, instead of being celebrated, those accomplishments have been ignored or

24 Boyle, 344.
dismissed. It is ironic that since the European colonization of the Western Hemisphere, the black workforce that supplied the free labor to build this country’s wealth has always been referred to as lazy and no good. In spite of the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans continued to face impossible odds based on the construction of race. According to David L. Smith, “Race is a strategy for relegating a segment of the population to a permanent inferior status…and a form of social definition that serves the interests of Euro-American hegemony.” Using Detroit as a model for the North, this study hopes to explain how some of the problems that have plagued the African American community during and after the Civil Rights movement are based on employment and housing discrimination practices born out of a direct link to the institution of slavery.

II. Discrimination in the Workplace:

Nature of Workplace Discrimination in Detroit During The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement addressed some major inequalities African Americans faced in the South. They had been deprived of the most basic rights the Constitution and its amendments guaranteed. Some blacks also took action to demonstrate that their basic rights were being denied in northern cities as well. In the aftermath of Detroit’s first race riot in 1863, whites’ most effective method to maintain racial segregation had been to control blacks’ position in the labor force. One hundred years later, this method continued to be effectively enforced. Before, during and after the Civil Rights Movement, discrimination took many forms in the Detroit work environment.

The first and most basic form of workplace discrimination is the denial of work. It is only fair to mention that job denial to African Americans may be in part due to supply and demand working in concert with discriminatory practices. As Thomas Sugrue suggests in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, the large influx of black migrants to industrial cities during and after World War II created a labor surplus.²⁶ Blacks left the

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South in large numbers to escape Jim Crow practices and low-wage agricultural work. However, their migration in such large numbers may have contributed to unjust employment practices in the North.

The combined effects of the surplus labor supply and discrimination began to be felt at the end of World War II. White soldiers returning home from the war received priority in the job market. Although production was flourishing, qualified black workers found it harder to find jobs. For example, in 1948 Detroit newspapers ran ads for hundreds of jobs. However, for Joseph Mays, a qualified welder and former defense worker, his skin color proved to be a barrier to employment with the Dodge Motor Company. On several occasions Mays was told there were no openings, even as he observed whites filling out job applications.27 According to Sugrue, this was a common occurrence in cities like Detroit. All blacks did not experience this personally, but most knew of friends or family members who did.

Clearly then, the Civil Rights Movement was not an overarching revolution that addressed every injustice. In fact one author suggests African American employment options increased satisfactorily without the pressure of the Movement. Thomas Sowell asserts in *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality*:

Much has been made of the fact that the numbers of blacks in high-level occupations increased in the years following passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But the number of blacks in professional, technical, and other high-level occupations more than doubled in the decade preceding the Civil Rights Act of 1964.28

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27 Sugrue, 91.

28 Sowell, 84.
Sowell goes on to state that blacks made more gains in employment in the 1940s prior to the passage of civil rights legislation and the civil rights movement. This contradicts Joseph Mays’ experience of job discrimination. In support of his statements, Sowell references one of the writings of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Employment Income, and the Ordeal of the Negro Family*.

Further investigation of *Employment Income, and the Ordeal of the Negro Family* reveals that Moynihan had much more to say than Sowell revealed. Writing in 1965, after the possible apex of the Civil Rights Movement, Moynihan argued that until this time the Civil Rights Movement’s focus had been on liberty, but that the time had come to focus on equality. The rights associated with the idea of liberty: are the right to vote, the right to speech, and the right to assemble. The rights associated with the equality are access to economic, social, and political opportunities. According to Moynihan, over the years liberty had enjoyed more prestige in the white community, while equality suffered. Although newer middle class whites supported equal opportunity for blacks, they assumed equal opportunities could produce equal results, which did not always occur.

Moynihan proposed that certain actions by whites would have to occur before blacks achieved equal results in employment. Prior to describing the actions needed, he indicated that most Americans could understand liberty as a principle. However, middle-class support began to erode when equality became the issue. In spite of this, blacks

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29 Ibid.

would have to be allowed to move naturally into mainstream America as previous ethnic groups had done before. But, he cautioned, this should not occur by an act of force. Newcomers encounter less resistance in low-skilled occupations, therefore, the move into mainstream America may take more than a generation to be realized. Moynihan further asserted that employment measures the amount of progress that is made toward equality, and that in America it represents one’s group or individual identity.\textsuperscript{31}

In the midst of the Civil Rights Movement phase of acquiring Liberty, opportunities in employment took two different paths. Some members of the black community effectively pursued equal results in employment aspirations through education and training. However, this did not apply to the majority of workers in less skilled areas. According to Moynihan, “in many ways the circumstances of these workers relative to the white work force have grown worse.”\textsuperscript{32} He revealed that by 1965 the number of blacks living in cities had doubled to nearly 75 percent greater than whites, and the two-to-one unemployment ratio of blacks-to-whites had become normalized outside of the South.\textsuperscript{33} This pattern emerged across racial lines affecting teenagers as well. In 1948 black teenagers had an unemployment rate of 7.6 compared to 8.3 for whites.\textsuperscript{34} But by 1965 the rate for white teenagers had doubled while nonwhites quadrupled. During the same time only 45 percent of black men had a full year of employment.\textsuperscript{35} This increase in unemployment numbers for African Americans occurred

\textsuperscript{31} Moynihan, 746.
\textsuperscript{32} Moynihan, 747.
\textsuperscript{33} Moynihan, 748.
\textsuperscript{34} Moynihan, 750.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
during a period of economic growth and improved occupational patterns for African Americans.

By the 1960s the occupation options for blacks had increased. The movement of so many blacks to cities in the North led to a major decrease in the number of agricultural workers. During the years 1954-1964, which coincided with significant portion of the civil rights era, nonwhite professional workers increased by 130 percent. This number far outstripped all the professional workers in the economy.\(^{36}\) Meanwhile, the number of nonwhite clerical workers doubled; craftsmen and foremen increased by two-thirds; blue-collar workers increased by less than 16 percent; and service workers grew by one-third.\(^{37}\) Moynihan states, “Without question, the most conspicuous failure of Negroes to win their way in the world has been in the related field of managers, officials, and proprietors.\(^{38}\) Between 1955 and 1964 only a 0.3 percent increase occurred. Unlike previous immigrant groups, blacks arrived in northern cities during a decline in manufacturing jobs and a decrease in business opportunities. However, taking into account all of the gains made by educated African American workers and a reversal in the decline of manufacturing jobs, how did they fair in the labor market by the end of the decade? Unfortunately, it appears that as the civil rights movement under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. began to focus on inequalities in the workplace, as Moynihan suggested, both Dr. King and the movement were cut down by an assassin’s
bullet, perhaps formally ending the civil rights movement. But the lessons learned in the
movement could be transferred to new battles on new fronts.

Since the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 it has been illegal in the U.S. to
discriminate in jobs and housing on the basis of race. However, at the end of the 1960s
such laws had proved unenforceable on a large scale in Northern cities. At its core,
employment discrimination leads to economic deprivation, which leads to housing
discrimination-which leads to housing and educational segregation and the impossibility
of attaining equal results for African Americans seeking equal opportunities. This
occurred in plain sight of civil rights activists and their proponents, in spite of the Civil
Rights Acts of 1866, 1957, 1964 and 1968, all of which had been designed in some part
to guarantee African Americans access to the basic rights afforded white citizens.
Foremost, among these was a workplace free of discrimination from which the origins of
a person’s success or failure in life could be established and/ or dictated.

Although the denial of employment was the most blatant form of discrimination,
employers in Detroit and other northern cities maintained an arsenal of tactics to
circumvent providing equal employment opportunities to blacks. Some of those tactics
included: screening blacks in interviews; relegating blacks to the lowest and dirtiest jobs;
paying blacks less than whites; and denying training that could lead to promotions. All of
these tactics and more can be observed in one legal battle; *Stamps vs. Detroit Edison
Company* (DEC), which is representative of the nature of job discrimination in some
rather large companies during the post-Civil Rights Era.
In 1971, using methods developed in the Civil Rights Movement, Willie Stamps made the bold decision to demand equality in the workplace from the DEC, one of the most powerful utility companies in the country. Not unlike civil rights groups, he and fellow workers James Atkinson and Darney Standfield organized. Between 1967 and 1969 they formed the Association for the Betterment of Black Edison Employees (ABBEE). On January 6, 1971, they filed charges alleging unlawful employment practices against the DEC, Local 223 Utility Workers Union of America, and Local 17, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. On May 17, 1971, a suit was instituted in the Federal District court in Detroit.39

Stamps served as President of the Association of the Betterment of Black Edison Employees as well as plaintiff. He filed numerous applications over a three-year period in which he charged that he had been denied employment, based on written examination scores and being underweight. He had never been advised of the results of the examinations. He eventually found out that Edison company policy denied African American employees and applicants access to review their test scores.40 Stamps appeared qualified for a job at Edison. He was a high school graduate, a graduate of Washington College of Mortuary Science, and had been employed at the Veterans Administration


40 Stamps statement, 1.
Hospital for over two years as a semi-skilled machine operator. He was finally hired by the DEC in 1967 after asking for employment as a janitor.

Once hired, Stamps pursued advancement to better positions within the DEC to no avail. He applied for several jobs and continued to receive rejections for failing examinations or lack of seniority. In response to such practices, the men organized the ABBEE. The group also formed because in a city that was 50 percent black, African Americans only constituted 2-3 percent of DEC’s employees, and because those few blacks employed by the DEC were confined to menial jobs, with no opportunities for advancement. It should be noted that in the early seventies, the DEC was not the only large company involved in a discrimination case. The EEOC had cases against General Motors Co., Ford Motor Co., and General Electric as well. Ultimately, it would be the outcome of the DEC case that would set it apart from the rest.

_Stamps v. DEC_ requires a short overview of two figures central to the outcome of the case. The first is William B. Gould IV, who served as chief counsel for the plaintiffs Stamps, Stanfield, and Atkinson. Gould is a unique individual. A _Detroit News_ article

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41 Ibid.

42 Stamps statement, 2.


44 Professor William B. Gould IV was born in Boston July 16, 1936. After graduating from Cornell Law School in 1961, he took a job as assistant General Counsel with United Auto Workers in Detroit. The following year he studied comparative labor law at the London School of Economics, returning to the United States in the mid-sixties to work for the National Labor Relations Board and representing management and in labor law matters for a New York law firm. He served as a consultant to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1966. In 1968, he joined faculty at Detroit’s Wayne State University Law School. Since 1972 he has been the Charles A. Beardsley Professor of Law at Stanford University Law School. Professor Gould took a leave of absence from that position when he served as the Chairman of the National Relations Board (1994-1998). Professor Gould is also the author of several books including _Diary of a Contraband: The Civil War Passage of a Black Soldier_, which is about his great-grandfather William B. Gould I. For more information on Professor Gould see [http://www.law.stanford.edu/directory/profile/26/](http://www.law.stanford.edu/directory/profile/26/)
written in October 1973 states, “members of his family are so light-skinned that they are usually thought to be white.”\textsuperscript{45} However, the family descends from a very proud runaway slave and Union soldier, William B. Gould I. Western Electric hired Professor Gould’s father as an electrical engineer in 1930, after he graduated from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts, but his job was revoked when he identified himself as a Negro on the employment form.\textsuperscript{46} Motivated not only for personal reasons, Professor Gould thinks that the only way to end racial violence in this country is to eliminate employment discrimination through judicial decisions. Professor Gould became involved in the case at the suggestion of his colleague at Wayne State, John E. Mogk. Gould had been involved in groundbreaking work on Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Mogk worked with the New Detroit Committee, a community affairs organization formed in the wake of the 1967 riot. Willie Stamps had contacted New Detroit concerning their issues he faced at the DEC.

Judge Damon J. Keith, another important figure in the Stamps case, was born in Detroit in 1922, shortly after his parents relocated from Atlanta, Georgia. The first person in his family to attend college, he received his bachelor’s degree from West Virginia State College in 1943. Afterward, he served in the U.S. Army during World War II. The injustices he experienced in the Army influenced his decision to go into law. According to Judge Keith:

But then I went into the Army. And a friend of mine Tom Newson, who had gone to the Detroit College of Law and then was taken into the Army told me. He said,

\textsuperscript{45} Don Ball and Jeffrey Hadden, “Edison Ruling a Civil Rights Success,” \textit{The Detroit News}, October 18, 1973, sec.D.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
"Damon, I think there are great opportunities in the law for blacks and there will be in the future." And we had sat around in the barracks in Europe, excuse me, and other places talking about the law. And I said, "Well Tom, I might be interested in that." And I guess what really triggered this in my mind was when I came back to the States after coming back from Germany--World War II--to see white German prisoners riding in the front of the buses and going into places down South for whites only and I couldn't go in. I said this cannot be right in a country that I have fought for, and fought against these same men. And they're enjoying all the benefits of life in the United States only because of their color and during the war they were our enemies! And I said, maybe I can do something in the law. This isn't justice. And so that sort of got me started. And wanting to know--and when I went to Howard that was just what I needed.47

Judge Keith received his law degree from Howard University in 1949 and a Master in Laws (LL.M.) from Wayne State University in 1956. He served as chair of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission and president of the Detroit Housing Commission. President Lyndon Johnson later appointed him to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan in 1967. He was only the second African American to sit on that court. He served in that position until President Jimmy Carter appointed him to the U.S. Court of Appeals in 1977, where he continues to serve as a senior judge.

Beginning in 1969, the ABBEE met with DEC officials in hopes of instituting programs to achieve equality for African American workers, only to have their requesta denied. By 1971 they had composed a list of the DEC and the Unions’ discriminatory practices. Stamps charged in his statement to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that:

The Company engages in word-of-mouth hiring, particularly where skilled trades jobs are involved…such a method of hiring has the effect of perpetuating a predominantly white workforce;
Written examinations are required of all applicants and, in our judgment, such tests are not related to work…

Tests taken at the time of hire are often used against the black employee who surmounts the hurdle of being hired when he applies for a promotion. The company utilizes numerous apprenticeship examinations and other tests which are non-job related and which screen out blacks. The seniority system operates so as to impede the transfer of blacks from lower level janitorial jobs into which they are hired for the most part to skill trades jobs...The company fills such skilled trades jobs...by hiring from the street. For the most part, the hires have been white. If the employee has an opportunity to transfer, he is not able to take the seniority ...to where skilled trade opportunities are to be found.

Of approximately 2000 official and managerial positions...approximately ten are held by black employees...a white employee still stands a better chance statistically of being hired by the Company as well as being hired into a better paying job...  

Stamps’ statement to the EEOC also indicated that on the eve of the lawsuit he had been informed that his examination results suggested that he would perform well in the skilled job of a cable splicer. However, he had never been offered a job in that position. In the case of plaintiff, Darney Standfield, his test scores had been used against him when he applied for a job reading meters. It had been over twenty years since Joseph May had been denied employment at the Dodge Motor Company and seven years since the passage of major civil rights legislation, yet major institutions continued their discriminatory practices.

Prior to 1964 companies such as the DEC could avoid legal consequences for their discriminatory practices. On April 9, 1866 Congress passed the first Civil Rights Act. The act sought to overrule the so-called Black Codes of southern states. A collection of state and local laws in effect in the southern U.S. states in the late nineteenth century, the codes sought to impose limits on the rights of former slaves, such as the right

48 Stamps statement, 3-5.
to vote and the right to work in certain occupations. The Civil Rights Act also supported the Thirteenth Amendment, which prohibited the use of a discriminatory badge of servitude to return blacks back into bondage. For all of the 1866 Civil Rights Act’s good intentions, its effectiveness was limited without the power of enforcement.

Not until Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did the government address how employers evaded the Civil Rights Act of 1866.49 Title VII outlines in detail employer, employment agencies, labor unions, training programs and others whose actions constitute unlawful employment practices.50 For the purpose of this study, it refers to employer and labor union practices. Title VII effectively addresses all of the allegations in Willie Stamps’ statement to the EEOC. For example, “it shall be an unlawful employment practice for a respondent, in connection with the selection or referral of applicants or candidates for employment or promotion, to adjust the scores of, use different cutoff scores for, or otherwise alter the results of, employment related tests on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.”51 According to Professor Gould, “Title VII of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the most comprehensive law relating to employment discrimination; most of the law that has evolved in this field has developed under this statute.”52

Title VII also included the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Arguably, had the EEOC been created in 1866, African


50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

Americans may not have been subjected to as much discrimination in the workplace. The EEOC is federally funded and empowered by the federal government to prevent unlawful employment practices. As stated in Title VII, “Each United States district court and each United States court of a place subject to the jurisdiction of the United States shall have jurisdiction of actions brought under subchapter (f) of the EEOC Enforcement Provisions.” In 1972, amendments removed the EEOC’s investigation and conciliation of charges limitations. It could then bring an action through the U.S. Attorney General in a U.S. district court against a non-responsive party. The law now stated that “The district courts of the United States shall have and shall exercise jurisdiction of the proceedings for civil action.” As a result of the formation of the EEOC, blacks had an agency with the power to defend and protect their civil rights in the workplace.

In arguing their case against DEC, Gould and his colleagues had to present both direct and statistical evidence that racial discrimination did in fact take place at the company. It became clear to Gould and his team that the practices Stamps and his colleagues had complained about, involved hundreds of employees. Although the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) financed the litigation, Gould and his team did not have the manpower or resources needed. Therefore, they asked the Justice Department to intervene as it could. According to Professor Gould:

They sent Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents to eighty of the workers homes: forty blacks and forty whites. And they asked those people...how they got their jobs, because they wanted to show, as we did show that, that the, you know if you were white you would be likely to get referred into the white jobs. And if you were black you didn’t know where the good jobs were and the, they

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would automatically send you, the personnel people would send you to the black jobs.  

When Professor Gould mentions white and black jobs, it is a reference to the fact that whites held the best and safest jobs, and blacks were confined to janitorial and dangerous positions. Professor Gould asserts that the agents were being told the truth. Since most FBI agents at that time were white, and that people dared not answer their questions dishonestly.

Gould and his legal team questioned many employees at the DEC about the alleged discrimination practices, including those at the top of the company. They called in Chief Executive Officer, Walker Cisler to testify. Fortunately for the plaintiffs, Cisler’s testimony may have bolstered their claims. Cisler agreed that there had not been many blacks hired at the DEC. He thought that things had gotten better, but the growth in black employment had been slower than he expected.

In Cisler’s testimony it becomes apparent that some of Stamps’ accusations were well founded. For example, Cisler was asked, “did the company during your administration have any policy by which it gave preference either in new hiring or in promotions to people who were relatives of other people connected with the company?”

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55 Gould telephone interview.

56 Gould telephone interview.

Cisler attempted to justify such actions by stating, “I think this has entered in almost everywhere that I have been, whether in industry or in government, and therefore you are always in the position of having those in your employ seeking to have friends or relatives in the same employment.” Cisler stated that this was not a company policy and that he did not think that it influences the recruiting process at the DEC. It seems difficult to believe that he was unaware of such informal policies, especially when it was revealed later that two-thirds of the company’s employees have or have had relatives or friends employed by the company.

During his testimony, Cisler continued to fail to show that the DEC did anything to provide blacks with equal employment opportunities. At one point Cisler stated that blue-collar jobs were very technical and demanded well-trained and experienced personnel. But then he contradicts himself in saying that most workers in operating jobs in the production department did not have experience. In the case of cable splicers, he revealed that less than 15 percent had experience when hired. Cisler then attempted to include black employees in these skilled positions to no avail.

Cisler recalled that when he started with the company in 1943 there were blacks working on the operating side. He even stated that he always made it a point to get to


59 Ibid.

60 Cisler testimony, 31.

61 Cisler testimony, 32.

62 Cisler testimony, 33.

63 Cisler testimony, 34.
know them personally. However, he could not recall any of their names, and perhaps more importantly, he could not recall any blacks in operations in positions other than maintenance. In an attempt to give blacks more status he states, “They held jobs of importance having to do with the maintenance of buildings.” He could not recall the name of a black man in an operating position during the 1940s, because there were none until 1952. The attorney for the Department of Justice, Robert P. Gallagher, also informed Cisler that the first black lineman had been hired in 1963 and sub-station operator in 1968. Furthermore, Mr. Cisler confessed that he did not know that until the early sixties most blacks worked as janitor’s and utility servicemen. As CEO he appeared to be very uninformed about policies that contributed to the company’s racial makeup. Cisler’s presence on the stand could be perceived as a conflict of interest. In conjunction with his position with the DEC, he also held a high position in the New Detroit Committee (New Detroit). New Detroit had been created in response to the Detroit Riot in 1967. Willie Stamps originally contacted New Detroit with his grievances against the DEC. In spite of Cisler’s position in New Detroit, noted William Serrin of the Detroit News, the government charged that, “the firm had been contributing privately to practices it had opposed in public,”.

New Detroit and the Kerner Commission found twelve important wrongs and grievances perpetrated against the black community in 1968; a time period covered

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64 Cisler testimony, 35.

65 Ibid.

during Cisler’s testimony. Unemployment and underemployment appeared second on the list. New Detroit asserted that:

Most other ethnic groups in America have gradually become more and more absorbed into the total community, showing their ethnic and national characteristics less and less. Or at the very least, they have that option. But the Negro does not. The fact of his color is too obvious to be ignored.

New Detroit determined that blacks were more than three times likely to be unemployed than whites as a result of environmental and direct discrimination. Environmental discrimination results from the failure of blacks to receive the necessary education for employment. Direct discrimination prevents educated and qualified blacks from employment, which is indicative of some of the actions at the DEC.

Gould’s interview with DEC employee, Norman Lewis provides evidence of both environmental and direct discrimination under Cisler’s administration. After returning home from serving in the military in 1958 Lewis took classes at Wayne State University, but quit after a year. He then took night classes and received his first class refrigeration and boiler licenses. The City of Detroit hired him as a boiler operator in 1964. The following year, he went to work for the DEC as an apprentice-operating engineer. During that time he took the necessary tests to obtain his first class unconditional operators license, however the company would not pay him accordingly. Lewis states:

What I was asking them to do was to pay me for being a first class operator because I was holding down a shift as a first class operator with fellows that had conditional license—I was the only operator who had an unconditional, first class license at the time, and the fellows that were training me had conditional licenses.

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68 Ibid.
whereby they got their license under the Grandfather clause—when the license code took effect, these fellows were already operating so therefore they were allowed to operate only at Edison Company. But I had went to school and I had passed the test, you know, coming somewhat later—that I had an unconditional license, I could have went anywhere and operated any amount of refrigeration.\(^69\)

According to Lewis, all of the fellows working with him had less background and training yet made higher wages than he did. This occurred in 1967 when Lewis was the only African American in the apprenticeship program.

Well beyond the DEC, African Americans encountered a variety of disadvantages in training policies within northern industries during the late sixties and early seventies. Not only did African Americans receive training from their less competent white counterparts, they also trained whites who soon surpassed them in promotions. One of the issues that may have contributed to my June’s descent into drugs and crime may have been the lack of recognition in the workplace. According to his mother, Ketrina Rice, he would often complain about training his white counterparts at General Motors Technical Center, who would then be promoted to a higher position with a better salary. Rice stated:

Like the young whites come in, or either whites come in and the blacks would teach them the jobs, and then they would move on up the ladder, and the blacks were still, in that same category or pay scale…They would be less educated…well it was more like favoritism. You [whites] didn’t know the job but some of your [whites] relatives got you in, and it just went on down the line like that. Cause they had guys doing skilled trades, know’d much about skilled trades as I did. They was getting that pay, cause they got in through they relatives.\(^70\)


\(^{70}\) Ketrina Rice interview by author, Detroit, Michigan August 5, 2010.
Although she asserts that whites had access to skilled employment that blacks did not, she also suggests that her son made decisions that led to a less than successful career.

Professor Gould gives much of the credit to Willie Stamps and Judge Damon Keith for the outcome of the case. He stated of Stamps and his colleagues, “they had some exposure to the possibility of opportunities and they knew they were being given the run-around. They were completely, they were authentic… they were really guys who were just trying to improve their position, and to improve the position of others who were similarly situated.”71 At one point the DEC tried to settle the case before the trial. According to Gould “the offer seemed relatively handsome by the standards of that time…Stamps said to me no, no.”72 It became clear to Gould that Stamps wanted to tell his story and he wanted the world to know what had been done to him and to others. According to Gould:

He was right. It was very important when you look at the record in this case, if you look at the findings of fact… if you look at what we were able to do. It was very important that, he just pushed aside hundreds of thousands of dollars and was willing to go forward.73

Gould also recounts that Judge Keith proved very courageous and careful in his decision. Judge Keith stood up for justice in a situation that put him on a collision course with the real powers in Detroit. Gould suggests that it was not as tough as a judge in the Deep South, but there were powerful people controlling industries in Detroit. Gould refers to Walker Cisler, the head of the DEC and New Detroit, as a very powerful man.

71 Gould telephone interview.
72 Gould telephone interview.
73 Gould telephone interview.
Although as a judge Keith he had life tenure, there could have been consequences for his actions. For example, promotions and advancements could have been denied as a result of finding in favor of the plaintiffs.

Regardless of possible consequences, Judge Keith issued a landmark decision against the DEC and Local 223 of the Utility Workers of America. On October 2, 1973 the Detroit Edison Company was found guilty of deliberate, illegal discrimination in hiring and promotion of blacks. Judge Keith found that systematic discrimination occurred because the company leaders did not pay attention to actions by white employees in lower levels of the company. For example, Gould proved to Judge Keith that black employees had been told to their faces they could not be promoted to better jobs because of race; white employees with lesser qualifications had been promoted to higher paying jobs than blacks; and recruiting at the DEC was done on a friends and relatives basis that shut blacks out.\(^74\)

The Detroit Edison Company was ordered to pay an unprecedented $4 million in punitive damages to blacks who suffered discrimination. Local 223 was also found guilty of discrimination in the company and was ordered to pay $250,000 in damages. Judge Keith ruled that Local 17 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers did not engage in discrimination with sufficient malice to warrant punitive damages. According to Professor Gould:

In addition to the judgment against the company and the union …individual blacks who were locked into low-level jobs or were rejected when they applied for jobs could collect individual awards of approximately $30,000 to $50,000 in back pay. This could add more than $1 million to the settlement… Others may qualify for “front pay”- or higher rates-until they reach higher skill levels which they were denied earlier… this is only the second award of punitive damages

under title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The first was for $500 to an individual.  

Judge Keith also ordered sweeping changes within the DEC. The company had to increase its workforce to 30 percent black as soon as possible; hire blacks into high-level technical and craftsman jobs until 25 percent of workers in that category were black; stop engaging in all practices that discriminated against blacks in hiring or promotion; and allow black employees to transfer to better jobs without loss of seniority or pay.

Although Professor Gould knew the case was appealable, he hoped the decision would serve as deterrent to such behavior by other companies and encourage defendants in pending cases to settle. He suggested that another case involving Pacific Intermountain Express and Teamster local 468 and 70 made Detroit Edison look like angels.

Even though Professor Gould and his team successfully proved discrimination had occurred, the DEC disagreed and began the appeal process. In October 1973, Professor Gould argued the case in appeals court for the first time. The DEC tried to get Judge Keith’s order stayed. This meant the company had to start dismantling the seniority system, start creating new tests, and they begin engaging in affirmative action in hiring and promotions. The financial award of the settlement, however, could not take effect during the appeals process. Although the DEC was involved in finding solutions to community problems, at the same time it was still willing to continue its discriminatory practices in the workplace. Once the company decided to appeal the situation, it could no

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78 Gould telephone interview.
longer separate the actions of employees from executives such as Walker Cisler. They all became guilty of workplace discrimination when they attempted to stop the dismantling of their system through the appeals process.

After eight years, the DEC finally agreed to pay more than $5 million to settle the case. The DEC appealed Judge Keith’s original decision all the way to the Supreme Court. The company lost all appeals and the original order changed very little. It was the largest award ever won against a single company in a discrimination class action suit. Some 450 current and former employees received average awards of $10,000 each. Blacks who were denied employment split $850,000.

By the time of the settlement, the DEC had abandoned some of its racist practices but the number of black employees remained low. By 1978 black employees constituted 14 percent of a workforce that had been 8 percent black in 1973. Also 45 percent of DEC’s new hires had been black. At the start of the appeals process it became apparent that the DEC had no clue how its actions affected the lives of black people. Even worse, the company would spend six more years and probably millions of dollars to defend its illegal practices that favored whites workers. If the DEC was willing to go to such lengths to protect white employment, then the question becomes, how long was it and other companies willing to fight change? More importantly why were they so resistant to change? According to Moynihan, “Employment not only controls the present for the Negro American; but, in a most profound way, it is creating the future as well.”

79 Helen Fogel, “Edison will pay $5 million to settle landmark bias suit” Detroit Free Press, August 17, 1979.

Because the DEC and other companies knew there would be consequences for economic equality on a large scale, including the possibility of a large number of blacks seeking to move into white areas, they were willing to defy change as long as it is possible.

**Post-Civil Rights Era Discrimination Interviews**

The *Stamps* case indicated the degree to which racial discrimination existed in the Detroit workplace at the end of the civil rights movement. Another shocking example of discrimination involved the Michigan National Guard. Clarence Clavon is retired from the Michigan National Guard and Detroit Public School System. Throughout his career in the military and school system he has represented minorities in discrimination lawsuits. He is presently chairman of the Minority Active and Retired Military Improvement Committee, Incorporated. Born in Detroit, Michigan in 1936, Clavon spent twenty-eight years in the military and retired at the rank of Captain in 1982. He had taken courses to prepare himself for advancement to the rank of general. That never happened, however, because in addition to his job as transportation director he had taken it upon himself to help African American men and women in racial discrimination cases at Selfridge Air National Guard Base (located just outside on Detroit).

In 1980 the assistant adjunct general for the Michigan National Guard asked Clavon to back off because he was creating problems. Clavon stated that although five white officers were found guilty of discrimination (some had since been promoted) the general confronted him, even though he had not broken any rules. He found out later his paperwork for promotion to the rank of Major had been held up in the state capital. Mr.
Clavon states, “I never got a chance to really adjudicate my cause. And it appears that that is what always happens. The system works together for the detriment of any vocal black man or woman who fights to retain their integrity.”  

Clavon has always challenged the rules that denied blacks equal rights based on his belief that if you have an education, stay clean, and have a good resume, you should be promoted. Nevertheless, these attributes did little to encourage the State to promote Clavon and other African American employees.

White entitlement in the workplace created insecurity among black workers. Jacqueline Randell began working for Michigan Bell in 1968, right after high school graduation. She recalled that after an African American manager had trained a white employee, and the company tried to promote her over the African American manager. However, in that situation the African American woman would not accept such tactics, she fought for, and won the promotion. After going to work for United Parcel Service (UPS) in the 1980s, Randell realized that discrimination still existed, but companies could work around it. After she received a promotion at UPS, she stated, “one white manager told me that that was killing two birds with one stone, being black and a woman.” However, promotions could be a source of anxiety and tension for black workers. A black coworker refused a promotion because she did not feel comfortable and did not know the job.

81 Captain Clarence Clavon (Retired Michigan National Guard), interview by author, August 4, 2011.


83 Randell interview, August 5, 2010.
The source of tension can be explained by observing how white employees might have handled the same situation. Recalling another conversation Randell states: “the white district manager, said “it’s not always what you know, he said, never would I turn down a job because I didn’t know anything… it’s not so much about color, it’s about money.” But Randell asserts that blacks did not have the resources to make such risky decisions. Whites would cover for other whites, or they could at least seek help, because they were more willing to help out other whites than they were blacks. As of the late 1980s, blacks in the workplace continued to struggle with the effects of discrimination.

Darlene Turner provides a different example of workplace conditions for blacks in the Detroit area. Turner is an executive who began her career at Ford Motor Company as a secretary. Fifty-eight years old in 2011, she had worked at the Ford Motor Company for thirty-nine years. She started at Ford in 1972 with plans simply to work for the summer before starting college. She has far exceeded the types of positions that Stamps and his colleagues were fighting to obtain.

After starting at the lowest possible grade level, Turner excelled at work in ways that whites had claimed African Americans could not. Following a couple of promotions she started working for a boss that acknowledged her potential. He told Turner, “You can do a whole lot more than just being a secretary.” He reassigned her to positions

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84 Randell interview, August 5, 2010.
85 Randell interview, August 5, 2010.
86 Darlene Turner is a salaried supervisor in engineering. She has been responsible for coordination and delivery of all of Ford’s power trains worldwide for the last 25 years. She manages $100 million in inventory per year. She is a second-generation Ford employee. Her father retired from Ford’s after 33 years with just one absence.
87 Turner interview, July 25, 2011.
with more responsibilities and better pay without being forced, unlike what occurred at
the DEC during the same period. This is the very situation whites had been trying to
avoid in the workplace for decades. If blacks got close enough to whites in management
and their true abilities were displayed this could ruin white dominance in the workplace.
But that seemed unlikely because such promotions created divisions among African
Americans, not unlike the divisions created between house slaves and field slaves during
antebellum. For example, when Turner was promoted to executive secretary for a vice-
president, she noticed that the few blacks who were in such positions were disliked by
other blacks. Turner states:

In my case and people always said it they would not allow a person who didn’t
look attractive, wasn’t pleasing to look at, you know, had a figure, had the ability
to do her job, but just fit the role. So if one or two of us got those positions we
had issues with the other African Americans…in the same department. Because
they would never get picked no matter how smart they were or whatever testing
they took.\textsuperscript{88}

Turner received some of the equality that Stamps fought for during the 1970s, but not
without a cost.

The growing pains of progress for African Americans in the workplace created a
new and unique set of problems particular only to blacks. According to Turner
promotions were frustrating, stressful, and isolating. Isolating because she could not
associate with other blacks workers since there were so few of them.\textsuperscript{89} After promotions
she encountered mistreatment from other African Americans and developed her own set
of coping skills. She contends, “So you learn after a certain point and time that you just
kind of stay to yourself, did your job, and you recognized the ones that you could talk to

\textsuperscript{88} Turner interview, July 25, 2011.

\textsuperscript{89} Turner interview, July 25, 2011.
and be around. And that made it kind of tough." These effects of workplace discrimination proved to be a lot harder to identify, therefore, they did not show up on the radar of whites in management. They were simply written off, ignored, or sincerely misunderstood by white America as any other black on black crime. The few people in Turner’s situation felt powerless to go to human resources because they did not think the white employees there would understand. Success in the corporate world for African Americans could also mean sacrifices in one’s personal life.

The advice and guidance Turner received from her mentor explains the duality and conflict experienced by African Americans who aspired to excel in the workplace. Dale Peterson took Turner under his wing and showed her how the corporate world worked. Because he believed she had potential he made sure she knew the right people and the right places to go. He introduced her to people in the suburbs who controlled the access to opportunities in the city. Turner states, “He said to me, you are very bright, but your world is right here. He said, ‘you need to learn things that are outside of here.’” He was telling her that she had to expand her horizons beyond the confines of Detroit. White flight had been in effect for several years, and many black people did not have social lives that included whites in the 1970s. Her black coworkers suspected her and Peterson were intimately involved, however, she stated that that was not the case.

Turner admits that she was exposed to many things that her black friends in the city knew very little about. Peterson encouraged her to participate in stock purchasing

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90 Turner interview, July 25, 2011.
91 Turner interview, July 25, 2011.
92 Turner interview, July 25, 2011.
programs and 401K plans. “A lot of things are not divulged to African Americans in corporate America,” Turner observes. It takes a certain kind of person to take interest in you, and to share information such as Peterson did.” Finding a mentor seems as though it would be pretty simple, but some whites still retained outdated perceptions of African Americans, especially black men. Turner contends that she never saw a black man receive the positive recognition and feedback from white male superiors that she did.

Nor did she come across a black man with a mentor or in any managerial position until the 1980s. She recalled there being 12-15 black draftsmen and designers during the 1970s to 1980s, but not one in a supervisory position. Even in salaried positions actions similar to those Stamps had taken proved necessary. Turner states, “they worked, got their seniority, a couple of them had to fight and file lawsuits… for what they knew were inequitable pay, promotions…” Turner recalled a situation in the 1980s, when a black worker trained a white worker who was one grade below him and the white worker became his boss. An alternative to Turner’s thinking could be traced back to the fears of 1863; that white men did not want to lose their jobs to black men. In fact, African American women often received more promotions than did black men.

Ford Motor Company had been engaged in the same types of tactics to deny African Americans equality as the DEC. Although Turner was not a member of an African American class action lawsuit against Ford, she did have to tell the truth in the deposition. At the time Mr. Peterson was no longer her boss. But when questioned by

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93 Turner interview, July 25, 2011.
94 Turner interview, July 25, 2011.
95 Turner interview, July 25, 2011.
his director, Turner acknowledged why she never mentioned the mistreatment she had to endure under Peterson’s replacement. She did not think anything would have been done because she is black. Saying nothing is how she coped with the uncomfortable situations on the job. When the director asked about her thoughts on the class-action suit, she revealed that she thought they had a legitimate complaint.\textsuperscript{96} Turner stated to the director, “Look I sit in the meetings where we rank people for performance and automatically the black people go to the bottom, no matter how good they are, or how great they are, they go to the bottom… The worse performing white person will be on top of the best performing black person…that still happens today.”\textsuperscript{97} Although Turner had the advantage of mentorship, it had limited impact because she was the exception, not the rule.

Had more blacks received mentorship similar to what Turner received, there could have profound effects on the state of African Americans in the workplace. Unfortunately, history reveals how the dominant society has constructed certain discriminatory conditions that African Americans must accept if they are to survive. Turner realized that Peterson could not mentor every black person at Ford. Therefore, she felt it was her duty to share what she learned with other African Americans. Perhaps more importantly she realized it was necessary because in many cases blacks suffered from defeatism. According to Turner, if African Americans had the benefit of mentorship:

We would be able to… contribute as an economic base as African Americans or black people. I think the level of education would be at a different level than it is at. I think with more awareness, as a culture, as a group of people, we would elevate ourselves okay. Because a lot of times just like any place else we have a

\textsuperscript{96} Turner interview, July 25, 2011.

\textsuperscript{97} Turner interview, July 25, 2011.
common terminology that says, “I am okay just to have this.” And that shouldn’t be the case.\textsuperscript{98}

The absence of any type of widespread mentoring programs for African American employees meant they could not develop social relationships with the right people. The importance of social relationships cannot be overstated. Peterson provided Turner with access to a different world but her greatest benefit from their relationship; was the knowledge that all white people in the workplace were not bad. This is another element in her coping mechanism that has kept her working for Ford during some extremely difficult times. In spite of Turner’s ability to expand her social network outside of the city of Detroit, other limitations, such as housing discrimination remained. It impacted the life of June and many other African Americans who had breached the upper levels of employment in Detroit.

\textsuperscript{98} Turner interview, July 25, 2011.
III. Housing Discrimination in the Metropolitan Detroit Area:  

Housing Discrimination in the City of Hamtramck

In some cases of employment, equal opportunities did translate into equal results, but not without some drawbacks. Those shortcomings can be best exemplified by the myth that blacks and whites in the North lived together in peace and harmony. At the time of Dr. Sweet’s death in 1960, thirty-five years after the crowd had gathered in front of his home on Garland Avenue, what progress had been made in housing discrimination? Not unlike Dr. Sweet, June made more than enough money to reside outside of the city. The General Motors Technical Center is located in Warren, Michigan just outside of Detroit. However, for African Americans, the city of Warren, other suburbs, and certain sections of Detroit could have been as far away as Birmingham. At the time Warren was a community made up of small post-World War II single-family bungalows and apartments.

The inhabitants of Warren were mostly skilled or unskilled laborers in local automobile factories or some related industry. Not unlike the black migrants from the south, they and their ancestors came to Detroit to move upward and onward, leaving those of their kind without the same dreams to their own devices. Unfortunately the mark of race prevented African Americans capable of moving onward from doing so. Most if not all blacks in Detroit were aware of the unwritten rule, that they were not welcome in the suburbs outside of Detroit. Therefore, June could not reside in the city of his employment with General Motors, the largest employer in the world at the time. And just as they had erected barriers to keep blacks underemployed, whites were equally
determined to confine them geographically, because so many whites believed that all blacks are the same regardless of talent, intellect, or intent.

Much as they had in the racial discrimination case against the DEC, African Americans had to rely on the justice system for equality in housing. In 1917, the United States Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision addressing government-instituted racial segregation in residential areas in the case of *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U. S. 60. The court held that a Louisville, Kentucky city ordinance prohibiting the sale of real property to African Americans violated the Fourteenth Amendment, which protected freedom of contract. In response to *Buchanan v. Warley*, whites resorted to private restrictive covenants. Racial restrictive covenants barred blacks and other minorities from owning or renting property in order to maintain residential segregation. In Detroit, Dr. Ossian Sweet succeeded in finding a way around the restrictive covenants, but not the sentiments that accompanied them.

Restrictive covenants remained in effect for over twenty years. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) initiated unsuccessful lawsuits against restrictive covenants throughout the 1920s and 30s. Finally, in 1945 the NAACP had some legal success. According to the Library of Congress:

In 1945, J.D. Shelley, a black man, purchased a home in St. Louis covered by a restrictive covenant. Louis Kraemer a white neighbor, obtained an injunction in the Missouri Supreme Court to bar occupancy. The NAACP appealed *Shelley v. Kraemer* along with restrictive covenant cases from Detroit and Washington, D.C. to the U.S. Supreme Court. On May 3, 1948 the Court affirmed in *Shelley v. Kraemer* and *McGhee v. Sipes* the right of individuals to make restrictive covenants, but held that the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause prohibited state courts from enforcing the contracts. On the same day, the court
ruled in *Urciolo v. Hodge* that restricted covenants could not be enforced by federal courts.\(^99\)

However, as in the case of Dr. Sweet, even legal success did little to change the sentiments of northern whites. They adapted to the changing attitudes regarding race and continued to confine African Americans to certain locales, generally poorer kept areas that whites had abandoned.

For twenty years after *Shelley v. Kraemer*, whites continued to develop tactics to prohibit blacks from residing in certain areas. The housing discrimination lawsuit of *Garrett v. City of Hamtramck* provides one example of those tactics. Hamtramck, Michigan is not technically a suburb; it is actually surrounded by the city of Detroit. Nevertheless, this case best illustrates the extent of housing discrimination against African Americans during and after the Civil Rights Movement in the Detroit area. The significance of this case lies in the fact that the defendants were not private companies, but local and federal government agencies. It confirms the allegations in Douglass S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton’s *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. They assert:

> The emergence of the black ghetto did not happen as a chance by-product of other socioeconomic processes. Rather, white Americans made a series of deliberate decisions to deny blacks access to urban housing markets and to reinforce their spatial segregation. Through its actions and inactions, white America built and maintained the residential structure of the ghetto. Sometimes the decisions were individual, at other times they were collective, and at still other times the powers and prerogatives of government were harnessed to maintain the residential color line; but at critical points between the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the

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passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, white America chose to strengthen the walls of the ghetto.\textsuperscript{100}

Unlike some other instances of housing discrimination, whites in the Garrett case removed blacks from areas of Hamtramck under the guise of urban renewal projects that began in the early 1960s. The case came before Judge Keith on October 13, 1970. Displaced black residents of Hamtramck brought a class action suit against the city and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The plaintiffs were represented by the Housing and Center for the Wayne County Neighborhood Legal Service (NLS). According to the \textit{Detroit Free Press}, “Edward King, NLS attorney, said the city discriminated against his clients’ rights by failing to provide adequate relocation for persons displaced by urban renewal projects.”\textsuperscript{101} Federal law dictates that people who are displaced because of city projects or roadwork should not be left to manage for themselves; housing should be found for them. The projects also lacked substantial provisions for low income housing as well. In this case Hamtramck did not make provisions for African Americans living in the Denton-Miller and Grand Haven areas of the city.\textsuperscript{102}

Hamtramck’s African American population did not reflect its surroundings. As a result of the city’s discriminatory practices, the African American population decreased significantly during the 1960s. TALUS survey employee Patricia Cousens testified that


\textsuperscript{102} “Injustices Must Be Corrected” \textit{Detroit Free Press}, October 11, 1974.
the city’s black population declined from 14.4 percent in 1960 to 8.5 percent in 1966.\textsuperscript{103} Cousens found the decrease unusual considering that during the same time Detroit’s African American population increased from 29 to 36 percent. Whereas the Denton-Miller and Grand Haven areas of the city had no plans for rebuilding, the Wyndotte Street project did. However, it had no provisions for the displaced African Americans.

The Wyndotte Street project was destined to become senior citizens’ housing designed to serve mostly whites.\textsuperscript{104} During the Wyndotte Street clearing process the city destroyed primarily black-occupied homes while leaving white homes intact. Of the 308 homes destroyed, only 180 new units were to be rebuilt, and only 30 were designated for low-income residents.\textsuperscript{105} Furthermore, King also accused city officials of making statements indicating they wanted blacks excluded from new projects. According to the \textit{Free Press}, “These were suggestions that the new housing should be for Hamtramck residents, not “Mississippians, Alabamans or Detroiter,” he said. Once again Judge Damon Keith made a landmark decision.

In November of 1971 Judge Keith ruled in favor of the 144 black plaintiffs who sued Hamtramck for racial discrimination when they were unjustly forced to move. Judge Keith found:

That the city of Hamtramck had planned and implemented a program to reduce the number Blacks in the city through various urban renewal undertakings which he described as “Negro removal.” Keith ruled that the actions violated the constitutional rights of the Black plaintiffs who had been displaced by the projects. The judge also found in the class action suit, that HUD officials who had

assisted the Hamtramck officials with these projects had also violated the plaintiffs rights.\textsuperscript{106}

Judge Keith ordered the city and the federal officials to locate victims of displacement and to offer them housing in Hamtramck. He also mandated that the Wyndotte Street project include units to accommodate those blacks who had been displaced. The defendants appealed the decision.

The findings at the appellate level affirmed Judge Keith’s decision. On September 26, 1974 the Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit found:

That the Negro population of Hamtramck fell from 14.4 percent to 8.5 percent between 1960 and 1966 and that this resulted largely from implementation of the “planned program of population loss” adopted as part of the master plan of the Vilican-Lehman Report. The record also supports the finding that the private housing market of Hamtramck was operated in a discriminatory fashion and that city officials were aware of this. There is also considerable evidence of racism and prejudice against Negroes on part of various city officials… We also conclude that the record supports the court’s finding in its order of March 30, 1973 that the City of Hamtramck has intentionally discriminated against Negro residents in violation of their constitutional and statutory rights.\textsuperscript{107}

The Court of Appeals also noted that various HUD officials were aware of the discriminatory practices in the city’s private housing market and held HUD responsible for the legal implementation of the ongoing Wyndotte Project, and any future urban renewal projects that it approved in Hamtramck.\textsuperscript{108} The Court of Appeals concluded that the Court had properly found United States Constitution and statutory violations by all of the defendants.\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{106} Agnes Stewart, “Federal Court Upholds Keith Housing Verdict,” \textit{The Michigan Chronicle}

\textsuperscript{107} United States District Court Eastern District of Michigan cases; Hamtramck housing discrimination (Garrett v. City of Hamtramck), 1971-75, box 14, file 2 “Damon J. Keith Collection,” Wayne State University, Walter P. Reuther Library, 1.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 2.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 3.
Likewise, the Court upheld Judge Keith’s recommendations to accommodate those who had suffered discrimination. The Court ordered the defendants to contact all black persons who had been displaced from their homes in Wyndotte, Denton-Miller, and Grand Haven by the actions of the defendants. In 1980 the various parties agreed on a solution of two hundred family housing units and 150 units for seniors citizens would be offered at below-market rates to black plaintiffs. The senior housing was built rather quickly but the rest of the construction did not begin until 2004 both because the city continued to fight it and because it had no money.\(^{110}\) As of 2010, only half of the two hundred units were complete. Unfortunately, after forty years, many of the plaintiffs have died or moved away, so the housing has been offered to their children or grandchildren. Even after winning the lawsuit justice was never really served to the victims of discrimination.

**The Defeat of Open Housing in the City of Detroit**

*Garrett v. The City of Hamtramck* brought to light a non-violent and indirect example of housing discrimination, however, blacks encountered much more direct and sometimes violent forms of housing discrimination during and after the Civil Rights Movement. Unlike the *Garrett* case the bulk of housing discrimination in the Detroit area involved the refusal to rent or sell property to African Americans. During the 1960s when city officials in Hamtramck ignored the rights of blacks, Detroit City Councilmen William T. Patrick, the first black elected to Detroit’s City Council, and Mel Ravitz

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proposed an open occupancy ordinance. The Patrick-Ravitz Open Occupancy Ordinance introduced on July 30, 1963 promoted:

The prevention and elimination of discriminatory housing practices and policies based upon race, color, religion, and national origin or ancestry…many of our residents have been compelled to live or stay in circumscribed and segregated areas and inferior structures because of discrimination. Whereas, discrimination, in housing denies equality of employment, results in segregated schools and segregation in other public facilities in violation of constitutional requirements…”¹¹¹

The ordinance attempted to legislate the property rights of white homeowners but it could not legislate their feelings. An anonymous citizen wrote to Councilman Ravitz:

I wouldn’t live in an apartment with Niggers anymore than I would live in a room with a rattle snake [sic], most of them are uncivilized and treacherous and are thought [sic] hatred by their leaders who are seeking power and prestige… I don’t think you or the US Government or the State has any right to tell us to whom we shall sell our property [sic] or who we shall have in our building. I am not bias [sic], bigoted or hate anyone, but I have rights under law as well as the niggers.¹¹²

Detroit Mayor Jerome P. Cavanaugh received hate mail for his support of open housing. A letter to Cavanaugh from Joseph A. Cardoni stated, “After hearing your decision on open occupancy, I and 3 of my neighbors are moving from Detroit…now that you are all pro negro… Here’s hoping your daughter and nieces all marry negroes [sic].”¹¹³ The mayor also received letters of opposition for his endorsement of open occupancy from homeowner associations such as the Greater Detroit Homeowners Council (GDHC) and the Greenbriars Home Owner’s Association. The Greenbriars Association wrote:


This Association is on record as opposing the proposed open occupancy ordinance which, [sic] from all indications in various meetings and in the press, has caused on [sic] enormous amount of resentment among white homeowners. It has damaged community spirit and has split this fair city wide open.\textsuperscript{114}

The sentiments revealed in the letters to city officials developed into an anti-open occupancy movement. The GDHC which represented some 200 groups and a potential membership of more than 250,000 people sponsored the Homeowners Bill of Rights.\textsuperscript{115} The bill declared that a property owner enjoyed the right “to rent or sell-or refuse to rent or sell to any person for their own reasons. In order to block the open housing proposal, the GDHC presented the city council with 44,000 signatures on a petition. The city council rejected the bill, but it won in the state Supreme Court and on October 6, 1963 the open occupancy ordinance was defeated in the city council, 7-2.

Perhaps 1963 could be considered one of the peak years of the Civil Rights era because of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have Dream Speech” at the March on Washington. Meanwhile, in Detroit the local response to integration became violent.

According to Stephen Grant Mayer in \textit{As Long as They Don’t Move Next Door: Segregation and Radical Conflict in American Neighborhoods}, “many white supporters of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Walk to Freedom” in Detroit had focused on Jim Crow laws in the South … rather than problems in Detroit. When housing discrimination in Detroit became the focus, many whites jumped off the bandwagon or made excuses about

\textsuperscript{114} Homeowners Associations letters to Mayor Cavanaugh October 2 and 5, 1963, box 113, file 1-4 “Jerome Cavanaugh Collection,” Wayne State University, Walter P. Reuther Library.

\textsuperscript{115} Stephen Grant Mayer, \textit{As Long as They Don’t Move Next Door: Segregation and Radical Conflict in American Neighborhoods} (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 176.
the pace of reform.”¹¹⁶ In Dearborn, Michigan, an outbreak of racial violence erupted that did not directly involve African Americans.

**Violence Erupts in Dearborn Over Housing Integration**

One month prior to the defeat of the Patrick-Ravitz Ordinance in October 1963 and thirty-eight years to the week after the mob assembled in front of Dr. Sweet’s home, white on white violence erupted in Dearborn based on a threat. On Labor Day, September 2, 1963 angry mob of about 400 persons gathered in front of the home of Giuseppe Stanizone, at 7427 Kendal. According to David L. Good’s, *Orvie: The Dictator of Dearborn: The Rise and Reign of Orville L. Hubbard*, whenever Stanizone lost his temper with neighbors on his block, “he would threaten to sell the house “to niggers.”¹¹⁷ For six hours the crowd laid siege to his home because it thought he had followed through on his threat. During the night, people in the mob threw bricks, bottles, eggs, and tomatoes damaging the house and breaking several windows.¹¹⁸ The mob also vandalized Stanizone’s car parked in the driveway. They burned the convertible top, dented and scratched the body, poured sugar in the gas tank, and salt in the crankcase.¹¹⁹ The fear of blacks moving into Dearborn prompted this unprovoked act of violence.


¹¹⁹ Good, 304.
It all began when Stanzione’s neighbors saw three African Americans and a moving van at his house and assumed they had bought the property. In reality, the two black men, one accompanied by his pregnant wife, were employees of a moving company. Stanzione’s new upstairs tenants, Mr. and Mrs. Kilgore, had hired the movers through a newspaper ad, and did not know they were black. Dearborn had a reputation for its official and unofficial policies towards integration. The mayor of Dearborn, Orville Hubbard had often expressed his racist and discriminatory beliefs. For example, he once told an Alabama newspaperman that he was “for complete segregation, one million percent.”

Good did a series of interviews with Hubbard for *Orvie: The Dictator of Dearborn* and on one occasion Hubbard stated, “I don’t keep the niggers out of Dearborn,” he told me. “I don’t keep anybody out of Dearborn. I haven’t done anything to encourage’ em [sic].” I don’t do anything to discourage’ em [sic]. Hubbard’s alleged actions during the incident resulted in federal and civil action not unlike the *Stamps* and *Garrett* cases.

Hubbard, Safety Director George Lewis, and Police Chief Garrison Clayton were accused of conspiring and denying equal protection of the law to Stanzione. Although Hubbard denied having any contact with Lewis and Clayton, who were at the scene of the disturbance, testimony from witnesses proved otherwise. According to the testimony of Dearborn Patrolman Nils Strang, also on the scene that night, “Safety Director George Lewis told him that he had to check with the mayor every 45 minutes the night of the

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120 Good, 31.

121 Good, 33.

incident to let him know what was going on.” Clifford E. Korsedal, a reporter for the Dearborn Guide, and Reverend Richard W. Morey, minister of Dearborn’s Cherry Hill United Presbyterian Church, testified that the officers did not assist Mr. Stanzione. Furthermore, the two men stated they entered the house together to find Stanzione, distraught, weeping, sitting in the living room surrounded by stones and broken glass. The government provided further proof that the three men had conspired to deny Stanzione his rights, but not enough for the jury to convict them.

In spite of its similarities to the other cases in this study, the Stanzione case had quite a different outcome. Even though Stanzione had faced harassment based on the city of Dearborn’s discriminatory practices, all defendants were found innocent. Another similarity in this case is that it had also been tried in front of an African American, Judge Wade H. McCree. But two very different aspects of the case may have changed the outcome. First, it was a jury trial, which did include one black man. Second, the victim in this case was white and may have been seen as a traitor to his race. This is only speculation, but the post-trial actions of the jurors may support that theory. Immediately after the trial ended, several of the jurors went out to dinner with the defendants. Although some jurors were concerned about propriety the mayor calmed their fears by mentioning he could not be tried again on the same charge. So the three defendants and several of the jurors celebrated the mayor’s victory in at a Dearborn hotel restaurant singing, “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow.” Noticeably missing from the celebration was


124 Good, 303.

125 Ibid.

126 Good, 311.
Lewis McGhee, the lone black juror who, when asked if he ever had any trouble in Dearborn, stated, “I always go through without stopping.” In 2012 those sentiments are still shared by many African Americans such as Darlene Turner who works in Dearborn but does not live there.

The racist legacy of men such as Orville Hubbard has continued to influence the views of both blacks and whites in regards to housing practices in the Detroit area. In the 1970s when upwardly mobile individuals such as June and Darlene Turner worked in Warren and Dearborn, blacks did not even consider living in many areas. The impact of employment and housing discrimination against African Americans cannot be overstated. It is just as unfair to accuse all African Americans of being shiftless, lazy, and criminal-minded as it is to accuse all whites of being racists, greedy, and violent. But only African Americans are lumped into a group, and not regarded as individuals, based on the negative actions of a few. Still, the negative actions of few can become a self-fulfilling prophecy for many in the group because of their limited choices.

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127 Good, 303.
Conclusion

Employment discrimination can lead to economic deprivation which leads to housing discrimination which leads to housing and educational segregation and the denial of equal results for African Americans seeking equal opportunities. However, as displayed in the examples above employment discrimination is not always a prerequisite for housing discrimination. June is one example of an intelligent individual who in spite of his all his talents, good looks, and everything else I admired about him, could not escape the pitfalls of racial confinement. As Thomas Sugrue has observed, “William Julius Wilson argues that the gains of affirmative action and the opening of the suburban housing market to blacks in the 1970s allowed middle-class blacks the opportunity to leave the inner city, thus contributing to the isolation and concentration of the urban poor.”128 According to Ketrina Rice, “I told June to apply for an apartment out where he worked. He did and was denied. Blacks could only live in certain areas then.”129 Therefore, Wilson’s assertion that the suburbs suddenly opened up to black people in the 1970s is certainly open to challenge.

This study does not claim that employment or housing discrimination causes one to become a criminal or junkie or both. It does suggest that employment and housing discrimination created two different results for African Americans in the post-Civil Rights era. It appears that each type of discrimination manifest differently in the black


population. Racial violence in Detroit had its genesis in white fear of job loss due to the scare of cheap black labor provided by ex-slaves. Wide scale racial violence in the twentieth century, however, did not occur as a result of employment differences. In 1863, white fear of job loss to ex-slaves helped spark Detroit’s first race riot. However, since that incident, racial violence in Detroit does not appear to be associated with employment issues. For example, in 1951 when a black employee at Ex-Cell-O was offered a job in an all-white department, 146 of 149 white workers walked out in a hate strike.\footnote{Sugrue, 109.} Although discrimination is deplorable under any circumstances, many African Americans have been willing to brave workplace discrimination in order to provide for their families. The findings for this study suggest that the lack of workplace violence during the integration process may account for African Americans persistence in the face of employment discrimination. Furthermore, workplace discrimination still persists in the twenty-first century, however, the legal system that served Willie Stamps so well against the DEC, still seeks to insure equality for all. According to the EEOC:

In June 2007, EEOC obtained $500,000 from a South Lyon, Mich., steel tubing company, which, after purchasing the assets of its predecessor company, allegedly refused to hire a class of African American former employees of the predecessor. Though the company hired 52 of its predecessor’s former employees, none of them were Black. EEOC charged that many of the White employees hired had significantly less experience than the Black former employees represented by the EEOC, and in some cases had actually been trained by the same African American employees who were denied hire. The suit also included other Black applicants who were denied hire in favor of less qualified White applicants.\footnote{Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Significant EEOC Race/Color Cases, http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/initiatives/e-race/caselist.cfm (accessed March 1, 2012).}
Therefore, it seems that concerns about employment, the most likely reason for racial violence in 1863, have over time let the legal system peacefully resolve African Americans workplace discrimination complaints.

On the other hand, housing discrimination often resulted in a less than peaceful outcome for both whites and blacks. Although whites are willing to use nonviolent methods of protest in the workplace, the same is not true for living spaces. In the examples examined above, whites in the Detroit area did not hesitate to use violence to keep neighborhoods all white. The violence perpetrated against blacks wishing to leave the ghetto is not unlike the violence that already exists in the ghetto. This means that the upwardly mobile African American in the post-Civil Rights era literally had nowhere to run to in Detroit. However, he or she could submit. And in the case of June, submission led to violent, criminal, and sociopathic behavior. In the case of Darlene Turner it did not. The only difference was her ability to draw on her suburban social networks.

Unlike employment, housing discrimination creates a different set of problems. Perhaps the biggest problem is environmental. Of all the black men that June grew up with in our neighborhood, none of them advanced much farther than high school, if that. All of them, the children of southern migrants may have believed that there was more to life than working on an assembly line, however, most proved incapable of accomplishing more. Or, it is possible they observed how June’s educational accomplishments did little to improve his chances of escaping the inner city.

Because of neighborhood segregation, June had one set of peers at work and another set of social peers. So what does an educated man forced to live with criminals, dope fiends, and illiterates do? He becomes the ringleader of all the above in order to
supply a drug habit that a General Motors paycheck cannot sustain. This drug habit that may have never developed if housing discrimination would have not denied him the opportunity to develop social networks with his suburb-dwelling co-workers. During my brief flirtation with street-life, I heard stories about June’s criminal exploits to feed his heroin-induced pain. For example, one dope-fiend, Willie Brown, told me how June would dress conservatively in a suit and trench coat, like an insurance man or door-to-door salesman, in order to break into apartments in areas known for having high quality consumer items, such as televisions and stereos. At other times he would organize a small band of thieves to relieve riverfront tourists of their belongings. I also know it was not beyond him to resort to more violent tactics when he was leaking (when a heroin addict goes beyond the time he/she needs another fix) such as armed robbery with a loaded or unloaded weapon, or even a water pistol. He was only one of many people in my neighborhood that were truly a menace to society, and maybe he was worse than most.

Conversely, everyone did not end up like June. Unfortunately, some never made it past the age of twenty-one. Benjamin White Jr. (Ben Jr.) had great parents who gave him the world. And to those who knew him he was a great son, student, and talented basketball player. So it was a complete shock to the neighborhood when he collapsed and died of a heroin overdose on his high school basketball court. According to Ketrina Rice, “Ben’s parents had recently purchased a lot in the suburb of Inkster, Michigan to build a home to try and get Ben Jr. out of the city.” Inkster is one of the few suburbs that blacks lived in during the 1960s and 70s.

132 Ketrina Rice, interviewed by author March 5, 2012.
Another example of the violence that housing segregation creates is Calvin Reed. When I was nine years old Calvin Reed served as my introduction to death, murder, violence, and the briefness of life in Detroit. Calvin was a character and somewhat feared in the neighborhood. According to Ketrina Rice, “Calvin would always pick on June because he was a little younger, until one day at the age of ten June caught him walking down the street and ran off the porch and hit him with a hammer.” From that point on, they remained best friends until nine years later, when Calvin was found shot to death in the yard of a vacant house three blocks away. I will never forget the commotion I woke up to when the police came to our house that night to question June, because he, Calvin, and another friend had been hanging out earlier that night at the local playground.

The cycle of violence continued to worsen until it took the life of my brother exactly twenty summers later. Compared to many of his associates in our neighborhood he lived to be a senior citizen, dying at the ripe old age of thirty-nine. The violence that ended his life has been well established since the first slave arrived in the Americas. The end of slavery in this country should have marked a new and peaceful existence for African Americans, but instead it gave birth to forms of discrimination that were effective outside of the south, all devoted to protecting the livelihood of whites. Although only violent in its genesis in nineteenth century Detroit, employment discrimination proved less violent in the twentieth century. Meanwhile, housing discrimination, which did not exist before emancipation, fueled more violent events, which denied upwardly-mobile blacks the opportunity to equal housing, and forced them to a confined existence that

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133 Ketrina Rice, interviewed by author March 5, 2012.
creates the illusion that all African Americans are the same. Unfortunately, in 2012 the condition continues to worsen because the legacy of violence continues to limit the black populace to the worst sections of the inner city.
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