The Invention of Urban Agriculture:

Crises and Transformations in Detroit, 1893 – Today

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Introduction: Detroit, High Stakes

Cities are places of imagination. We imagine from afar and we imagine from within how local customs and (un)built environments shape our lives. We imagine the possibilities (and impossibilities) that we and others may find in specific urban settings. We imagine, based on the stories we have heard, buildings and maps we have seen, and encounters we have had. As our minds interweave these different narratives, sensory impressions, and built environments, our imaginings become more complex.

Cities have reputations that stem from such imaginings. The first time I went to Detroit — keenly aware of how premature judgements could obscure my scientific gaze — I had an interesting encounter: In late summer, 2014, I was standing in a particularly viscous queue at Philadelphia airport's immigration control, waiting to be stamped and approved for domestic transit. Cell-phone use was prohibited, so I took to watching people. One border control officer caught my attention, as he interacted jovially with some clients, while avoiding acknowledging others. The difference seemed to lie in the client's visible ethnicity. As luck would have it, I ended up in his line. Previous experience had shown me that, unlike Germans, Americans tended to react to my white appearance first, my "ethnic name" second. I figured I would be fine.

> "I see you're connecting to Detroit? [Pause] Why would anyone go there!? You know there are some very dangerous people there."
> "Um…" Before I could come up with a TSA-appropriate reply, he continued:
> "Do you wanna take my gun?"
> I giggled, taken aback. "Oh, no, that's okay, thank you."
> "You should take my gun," he insisted, convinced by this display of femininity that I needed assistance. Again, I politely declined (quietly judging him by my European views on assault weapons).
> "But the people you're staying with will have a gun, right?"
> "I don't think so. They're hippies," I replied happily. His worrisome gaze looked me up and down, probably imagining where the inevitable bullets would strike my body. Slowly shaking his head from side to side, my naiveté clearly burdening his conscience, he decided to make one last attempt. A flick of his thumb undid the holster's hood. "Please, just take it!"

Some years have passed since this first trip to Detroit, yet the memories are still fresh. Back then, I had exceptional timing. Nobody shot at me and I arrived just as harvesting season began. I spent six weeks volunteering on numerous urban farms across the city. I took ample advantage of Detroiters' passion for explaining their city's history and inherent value to the first-time visitor. After hours of labor in the fields in the scorching sun, I would usually leave with a bag of freshly harvested produce, new interviews, and impressions to ponder, and facing an exhaustingly long bike ride past urban pastures. Biking gave me time to observe the city's countless paradoxes. Endless distances, burnt-out houses, an astonishingly large population of pheasants. Shaped by years of intellectual labor, my body now demanded twelve hours of sleep or more. The physical intensity of farming made me question glossy media stories that declared urban agriculture as a convenient, idyllic, fix-all idea for urban food deserts. Sitting in on a community meeting at a soup kitchen, I met a Black single mother who explained the effects of chronically underfunded public transport, working several minimum-wage jobs across the city, while also tending to her parenting duties. This began to open my eyes to the complex structural and personal realities of poverty. I awoke to toxic cultural and political simplifications that cloud poverty's systemic causes; a haze of normative judgements by the economically overprivileged on the economically underprivileged. In a predominantly Black city, the racial connotations of such judgements were hard to miss. I noticed the imbalance between who spoke, and for whom, and who remained silent (or was silenced). Now, Gayatri Spivak's provocative question ("Can the subaltern speak?") made much more sense.[1]

"It's all nice and well if these white people want to bike everywhere, but I simply don't have the time or energy," the woman said. She then explained that if she was late for a shift more than twice, she would be fired. Recognizing the privilege necessary to engage with sustainable practices embarrassed me at first. My colleagues encouraged me to push through this discomfort, disassemble the privileges of my white skin, and fundamentally question how I myself speak and for whom. This multilayered awakening was by no means a sudden event, but rather, it is an ongoing transformation. In this work, my aim has been to foreground marginalized voices. This often meant going against the grain of my archival sources — many of them originate from government agencies, municipal leaders, and newspaper reporting. I witnessed first-hand the historical power of archives. Using these observations to expand my

[1] Gayatri Spivak formulated this question in response to eurocentrism and the problem of representation. She focuses on the processes at work, and contends that within the construction of the West and its corresponding Other, intellectuals render the subaltern mute. Cf. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

critical gaze, I began to truly recognize the United States as a settler colonial country, historically ruled by white male elites, and built on deeply intertwined normative and organizational foundations.

Urban agriculture, too, is a practice built on ideals and values, as well as careful planning and ordering. Urban crop production, like any cultivation practice, depends on sufficient knowledge about the specific needs of plants, and careful management of their environments. However, high yields, even of highly profitable crops, can hardly justify the relatively inefficient and unprofitable use of urban land entailed in urban agriculture. As Harvey Molotch famously ascertained, within the logic of capitalism, cities are *growth machines*. In short, this means that political, economic, and sociocultural elites order and shape urban space through lobbying, zoning, and other political maneuvers. Through such processes, actors ascribe use and significance to space (which thus becomes place), based on their own prospective economic gains.[2] As a historian, Molotch's theory has made me wonder how urban agriculture managed to be a rather historical constant in urban life. This overarching question has guided my research. My main argument is that urban agriculture is a highly versatile tool for crisis intervention, which makes it an essential part of urban history. Economic crises, moral panics, wartime propaganda, managing socioeconomic change, political and grassroots mobilizations: all these diverse forms of crises, ranging from the ideal to the material, have found a response in urban agricultural practices.

What is *urban agriculture*? The term commonly serves as an umbrella for practices encompassing urban crop cultivation from urban gardening to urban farming. What determines the difference? The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) does not differentiate between urban and rural farms. The agency simply subsumes urban farms under its broad definition that "[a]ny place from which $1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold or normally would have been sold during the census year" constitutes a farm.[3] It has been noted that "cities must define and clarify their meanings for urban agriculture."[4] As a historian, I must add that the meaning of urban agriculture is not only spatially, but also temporally, contingent, and that the specificities of each of these two dimensions combine into

[2] Cf. Harvey Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Space," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 2 (September 1976), 309-332; Harvey Molotch and John Logan. *Urban Fortunes. The Political Economy of Place.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
[3] This broad definition has made it difficult for researchers to collect data. Lydia Oberholtzer, Carolyn Dimitri, and Andy Pressman, "Urban Agriculture in the United States: Baseline Findings of a Nationwide Survey," ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture (November, 2016), online: www.attra.ncat.org (accessed March 7, 2020).
[4] Mary K. Hendrickson and Mark Porth, "Urban Agriculture — Best Practices and Possibilities," University of Missouri Extension, Division of Applied Social Sciences (June, 2012), 6, online: http://extension.missouri.edu/foodsystems/documents/urbanagreport_072012.pdf (accessed March 7, 2020).

unique local temporary values and practices. What does that mean? The 2013 *City of Detroit Urban Agriculture Ordinance*, for example, offers the following definitions:[5]

> Urban Farm: A zoning lot, as defined in this article, *over one acre*, used to grow and harvest food crops and/or non-food crops for personal or group use. An orchard or tree farm that is a principal use is considered an urban farm. An urban farm may be divided into plots for cultivation by one or more individuals and/or groups or may be cultivated by individuals and/or groups collectively. The products of an urban farm *may or may not be for commercial purposes*.
>
> Urban Garden: A zoning lot, as defined in this article, *up to one acre of land*, used to grow and harvest food or non-food crops for personal or group use. The products of an urban garden *may or may not be for commercial purposes*.

Thus, the current legal definition in Detroit centralizes spatial dimension, while leaving potential commercial profits rather unregulated. This small observation already tells us a lot about the contemporary meaning of urban agriculture in the (former) Motor City. In a city whose population peaked at around two million in the early 1950s and has since shrunk to some 670,000, spatial abundance has become a central problem for economic and political elites. The oversupply of land depresses its value and results in diminished municipal tax revenue. Urban planners have attempted to address the issue by developing strategies for artificial shrinkage.[6] This signifies a disaster for residents whose neighbourhoods have been designated for complete abandonment, because basic infrastructure — such as water supply, upkeep of the electrical grid, policing, garbage collection, etc. — will cease. In this scenario, urban agriculture (and urban forestry) are serving as highly publicized ways of *greenwashing* sociopolitical disinvestment and urban austerity politics. Here, the financial interests of speculators and investors are displacing the livelihoods of some of the most vulnerable Detroit citizens.

How, one may wonder, does urban agriculture affect spatial politics, such as dealing with excess amounts of urban land? A 2008 study on the economic effects of urban agriculture in New York City revealed that urban gardens, especially urban community gardens, have a positive effect on neighboring property values. The authors showed that poorer neighborhoods especially see an increase in property values and that higher quality gardens have the greatest

[5] My emphasis, City of Detroit, "Urban Agriculture Ordinance," abridged version (February, 2013), online: http://detroitagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2013_Sharable_UA-Ordinance.pdf (accessed March 7, 2020).
[6] Cf. Detroit Future City, "2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan," (Detroit: Inland Press, 2012, second printing 2013), online: https://detroitfuturecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/DFC_ExecutiveSummary_2ndEd.pdf (accessed March 12, 2020).

positive impact.[7] This obviously means that urban agriculture practices don't simply serve to occupy land that would otherwise lie idle, but that in addition to decreasing overabundance, the practice itself also creates an economic value. This fact has caught financial investors' attention and the recent developments in Detroit — namely multi-million-dollar agricultural projects such as Hantz Woodlands or Recovery Park — have demonstrated the significant power of urban agriculture within the political, administrative struggle of dealing with empty land that significantly affects post-industrial cities like Detroit.

The second dimension of urban agricultural practices pertains to the role of food in cities. More recently, the global pandemic has revealed how volatile interdependent food supply chains have become. However, food insecurity has been an issue for poor urban communities for many decades. As Detroit saw a dramatic rise in urban poverty throughout the period of its deindustrialization, the struggle has been a major concern locally since at least the 1960s. As I show, crop production has been an often overlooked and surprisingly consistent resilience practice in cities like Detroit. Recently, urban agricultural projects have become popular features in media accounts promising organically grown, locally produced foods that contribute to the health and well-being of local communities at relatively low prices. This work shows that crop production, in spite of our predominant imagination of urban space as decidedly non-rural and therefore non-agricultural, has been a historical constant in American urban history. In fact, as I explore in the next chapter, agricultural practices guided the industrialization and urbanization of Detroit and have served political leaders as well as private citizens in their efforts to negotiate the effects of the growing influence of urban industrial capitalism on their lives. Since 2009, the global financial crisis, the subsequent urban austerity politics, and the eviction crisis have significantly contributed to the rise in popularity of urban agriculture. Food production that contributes to household budgets has become more relevant and the often self-organized nature of these particular kinds of urban agricultural ventures are filling gaps that underfunded and increasingly withdrawing urban governments have created. Today, numerous Detroiters run non-profit and for-profit urban farms and gardens across the city, addressing a vast diversity of issues. They battle against food insecurity, but also aim to create alternatives to a highly industrialized and subsidized agricultural system. In a city in which a large portion of the population relies on public and private food aid programs (like SNAP or WIC benefits, soup kitchens, and food pantries), a poor-quality food system has been

[7] Cf. Ioan Voicu and Vicki Been, "The Effect of Community Gardens on Neighboring Property Values," *Real Estate Economics* 36, No. 2 (2008), 241-283.

afflicting the physical health of the economic underclass.

Food security advocacy, as it is conducted by local actors such as the non-profits *Detroit Black Community Food Security Network* (DBCFSN) and *Keep Growing Detroit* (KGD), has risen to national and international prominence over the past decade. In 1996, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) concluded that "food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global level [is reached] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet the dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."[8] A growing body of research is addressing related issues such as nutritional well-being and the interconnections between health and food intake among economically disadvantaged people. Long gone are the days in which securing a minimum calorie intake lay at the center of food politics. It is well-known that today's issues around nutrition and well-being center around the accessibility of quality nutrition. Foods with high contents of saturated fat and sugar have become highly affordable and statistics on nutrition-related health disparities between socioeconomic, as well as ethnic and racial, groups reflect this.[9] A Detroit Food Policy Council study has shown that some 48 percent of all Detroit households are food insecure, with 40 percent of households relying on SNAP benefits. Several areas in Detroit have been designated food deserts and around 30,000 residents have no access to full-line grocers. At the same time, the city is ranked second in the nation in obesity and diabetes rates, tenth in chronic heart disease. The Detroit Food Policy Council has reported that 82 percent of school children qualify for free lunch programs.[10]

The interconnection between economic class, nutrition, and health takes on an even more complex political character when one takes into account the category of race. In a majority-Black city like Detroit, where some 82 percent of the population is Black, the importance of investigating the intersections between class and race is incontestable. In 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama brought to national prominence the idea of using vegetable gardens to promote issues around nutrition and health, cultivating an organic vegetable garden on the South Lawn of the White House. Obama's subsequent *Let's Move* campaign focused

[8] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Trade reforms and food security. Conceptualizing the linkages." Rome: Commodity Policy and Projections Service, Commodities and Trade Divisions (2003). Online: http://www.fao.org/3/y4671e/y4671e.pdf (accessed February 12, 2021).

[9] Cf. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Adult Obesity Facts" (June 21, 2021) https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html (accessed February 12, 2021).

[10] Cf. Learning to Give and Mary Rouleau, "Food Insecurity: It's everywhere." (2018) Online https://www.learningtogive.org/news/food-insecurity-its-everywhere (accessed February 12, 2021) and Alex B. Hill and Amy Kuras, "Food Metrics Report 2017" Detroit Food Policy Council and Detroit Health Department (2017). Online: https://de.scribd.com/document/373207033/Detroit-Food-Metrics-Report#from_embed (accessed February 12, 2021).

specifically on childhood obesity and advocated crop cultivation as an educational as well as physical activity for children and families. As the first Black First Lady in United States history, her campaign called attention to the severity of food- and health-related issues within the nation's Black communities. Simultaneously, the nation was reminded of Obama's historic predecessor Eleanor Roosevelt who had cultivated a vegetable garden on the White House lawn some sixty years prior, when a crisis of a very different nature was taking hold of the nation: World War II.

These two highly disparate examples reveal a third dimension of urban agriculture that this project investigates: the interconnection of crises and urban agriculture as an idea. This dimension reveals historically contingent ideas and ideologies that have motivated and shaped urban agricultural practices. While crop production certainly plays an important role throughout the history of urban agricultural undertakings, a closer look at the historic specificities, at motivations, discourses, and ideas around the practice reveal that urban crop production always served other, larger objectives. These have ranged from progressive re-education efforts in the late 19th century to wartime propaganda during both World Wars, coping mechanisms during food crises like the Great Depression, to more recent efforts to advocate for healthier lifestyles and diets.

When I started my research, I set out to explore two diverging narratives: one, painting urban agriculture as a means to "help" Detroit's recovery, and the other portraying it as a subsistence practice of predominantly poor and Black Detroiters. What I found on the ground was an overwhelming story, full of structural violence and tension, but also full of resilience and hope. I also found a host of anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers researching the same topic. As a cultural and environmental historian, this provided me with the perfect opportunity to do what we do best: hit the archives and emerge with triumphant news that nothing about this phenomenon is new, but it all has been done before. Why does that matter, you may ask? It matters because cities remember the past. They remember it, because people leave material and narrative traces, and because people themselves remember. Such traces and memories shape what we today consider the present, and will inevitably shape how we imagine and ultimately create our future. Urban agriculture in Detroit today is no different in these respects. Looking back is not simply about "trying to learn from mistakes of the past," although this is an important aspect. Moreover, looking back offers an opportunity to reflect on present values, material realities, and lived practices. When researchers study urban agriculture in Detroit today, it is vitally important they become aware that this city was the birthplace of urban agriculture in the United States and that there is a continuous history that connects

contemporary practices with this birth in 1893. The greatest gift history has to offer is to explore roots, remember predecessors and ancestors (especially those whose stories have been silenced or forgotten), and thereby honor their lives. This is my personal premise: if we do not value the past, we do not value our roots; where we came from and how we got here. To me that means we neither truly value ourselves, nor the present moment we live in.

This work investigates the history of urban agriculture in Detroit since 1893. Following the sentiment of the TSA officer, you might wonder "why would anyone study Detroit?" If I had been journeying to this city one hundred years earlier, this question would have been moot. Back then, Detroit was quickly ascending to become the United States' richest city. Its streets were bustling with life and thousands of migrants arrived every year, hoping that local industry jobs would offer a better future. Painting Detroit's history in broad strokes suggests that much like with cyclical capitalism itself, we are looking at a boom-and-bust story. Such parallels seem to make for an attractive research topic, especially for those searching for ammunition against or alternatives to capitalism (whatever those might be). They might be further inspired by the current growing urban agricultural activity in Detroit. It is true: local non-profit as well as for-profit urban farms often operate at the edges of the capitalist system. They combine cooperative and diversified business structures in the hopes of economic stability and sustainability. Crops are cultivated with organic methods, and in some cases, are even transported across the 139 square miles of Detroit by bike alone. However, as a cultural and environmental historian my objective is slightly different.

I begin this book with a deeper look at the idea of urban agriculture in and of itself. Within American cultural history, both agriculture and cities have formed fundamental pillars of American identity. As I explore in the following chapter (II), agricultural idealism formed the basis of this young country (as most famously encompassed by Thomas Jefferson and his conception of democratic-republican ideals). As I show, the agricultural practices, and their scientific evolution, became a growing concern as the United States was industrializing. In the second half of the 19th century, agricultural education served as a governmental tool to reach into rural families, and attempt to unify a heterogenous nation divided by civil war and splintering as it expanded westward. As such, agricultural education, especially of children and youth, played a central role in the making of the settler colonial United States. The theme of agricultural education of children and youth will appear in every chapter of this book, which speaks further to the role of agriculture in forming and reforming American identities. The second part of chapter II investigates Detroit's urban agricultural activity following the Panic of 1893 and the Great Depression. This methodological approach combines a thematic with a

chronological order, which highlights the changes and continuities of these two distinct time periods.

Chapter III mimics this dual approach and delves into the history of local and national war gardening during the two world wars. I analyze Detroit's social and environmental transformations and use them to investigate wartime urban agricultural production. The chapter ends with an in-depth analysis of activist Grace Lee Boggs's philosophical formation. I do this for two reasons: 1. To provide a basis for Boggs's socioenvironmental, agricultural activism that plays an important role in chapter IV. 2. To chronicle the post-World War II transformation of Detroit in an unusual and therefore (hopefully) more interesting way. Readers interested in a more common way of chronicling this period will find the footnotes of subchapter "1967, Rebellion" full of literature tips. The 1967 Rebellion marks the beginning of chapter V. Here I start out by investigating the role of food security in the onset of the urban crisis. Two government programs (one municipal, one federal) begin in the 1970s and mark the period of managing the socioeconomic transformations of post-war Detroit. The subsequent chapter (V) sees grassroots activists picking up where government withdrawal left off, reclaiming urban agriculture and politicizing practice. The final outlook (VI) compares and contrasts contemporary issues of race and class in Detroit's urban agriculture.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, agriculture had been emblematic of honest work, liberty, and progress. The 20th-century conception of progress was characterized by increasing efficiency and management of production and consumption processes. This necessitated a temporal acceleration only possible in densely populated areas: cities. Detroit, as is well known, quickly rose to the top of this new paradigm. Fordism made the Motor City unfathomably rich and produced an urbanity that has only recently come under mounting scrutiny. Indeed, what would cities look like without cars? Perhaps Detroit's other invention, urban agriculture, can give us some metaphorical directions.

II. Agricultural Identities, Poverty, and Reform: The Birth of Urban Agriculture in Detroit and its Re-Invention (1893-1897 & 1930-1938)

Origins: Gardens, Machines, and Selves

American culture is rooted in agrarian dreams and myths. Political culture and values draw from Thomas Jefferson's narrative of independent, virtuous farmers who form the backbone of the democratic nation. Jefferson juxtaposed this pastoral ideal with urban corruption and other essentialist conceptions of pollution. Leo Marx infamously asserted that Americans imagine landscape, land, and their place in it through cultural texts that bring the pastoral face to face with technological advancement and human agency: "[W]e can get some sense of the way the over-all shift in thought and taste contributed to the pastoral idea of America by noting three closely related preoccupations of the age: the landscape, agriculture, and the general notion of the 'middle state' as the desirable, or at any rate the best attainable, human condition."[1] Agriculture's centrality to these imaginations is rooted in religious conceptions of improving the soil through cultivation. Daniel Walker Howe outlines in *Making the American Self* how agriculture formed the basis of American identity formation, providing meaning and purpose for people's daily lives. Identities were constructed around the idea of self-improvement, which "originally derived from agriculture; to improve land or something else meant to turn it to good account, to make profitable use of it. One could improve an occasion, that is, take advantage of it. The word was sometimes used in a spiritual or moral sense: a preacher would improve a biblical text, that is, unfold its edifying application."[2] This formed a basis for American identities in which people "consciously committed themselves to a process of self-reconstruction."[3] Self-improvement provided "a kind of liberty that went beyond the right to consent to government and even beyond the right to choose what kind of person one would be."[4] This meant, then, "character development, an expression that implied self-mastery rather than self-gratification or the projection of an advantageous image to others."[5] At the core of this lay self-improvement rather than self-repression. By the 19th century, this Protestant ethic had been secularized and had become an "ethic of self-improvement, in which the diligent exercise of human powers was rewarded not only on the day of divine judgement but throughout this life."[6] The push to industrialize and mechanize agriculture shook these strong

[1] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden. Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 82.
[2] Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 123.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 122.
[6] Ibid., 124.

personal foundations to the core.

Simultaneously, these idealized and ideological imaginings contained an underbelly. Plantation farming traumatized generations of enslaved people,- and agricultural expansion and settlement schemes that progressively displaced indigenous peoples became the bloody foundation of the American settler colonial project. Postcolonial scholar Walter L. Hixson defines settler colonialism as referring "to a history in which settlers drove out indigenous populations from the land in order to construct their own ethnic and religious national communities."[7] Alluding to Benedict Anderson's conception of the nation as an "imagined community,"[8] Hixson stresses the centrality of ethnic and religious homogeneity, the gender binary, and heteronormativity in settler colonialism. Building on this approach, I investigate American agricultural history as an attempt to establish institutional, governmental control over the most intimate creative, spiritual, and moral imaginations and self-making practices. The institutions and practices that emerged from these efforts have played a central role in the history of American urban agriculture, where re-imaginations merge with debates and conceptions of the urban. Keeping Jefferson in mind and recalling the position of urban space as a corrupting influence on virtuous characters in his foundational construction of American democracy, we can easily recognize the reformist or interventionist potential of agricultural practices in urban spaces.

The notion to improve agricultural practices was a central part of the American settler colonial project in the 19th century. Here, I consider the interwoven history of national economic interests in agricultural efficiency and the establishment of educational sites to organize and manage knowledge to these ends. Keeping in mind the cultural dimension of agricultural myths and ideals, agriculture's institutional history takes on elevated meaning, especially when we consider agriculture as a tool for top-down reform efforts. In the summer of 1862, in the midst of the American Civil War, President Lincoln's Union-era government was devising means to fundamentally alter the relationship between the federal government and the states. The political genius of this plan lay in the fact that with one piece of legislation they managed to effectively cement the notion of a unified, democratic nation while facilitating the cultivation and practice of local, regional differences. This piece of legislation was called the Morrill Act, which saw the establishment of "land-grant" colleges and universities. Its core idea was to re-distribute federal land to Union states and territories in order to establish educational

[7] Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism. A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.
[8] Cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991²).

institutions that promoted the liberal and practical education of an industrializing society.[9] What this meant was that in return for their loyalty, each state would be able to increase local educational levels according to its needs, which would lead to economic growth. Simultaneously, the act created "a recognizable pattern of public and private [higher education] institutions."[10] Land-grant colleges and universities focused on agriculture, the "mechanic arts" (technology), domestic science, and nutrition, thus spreading education, as well as underlying industrial-age ideals of productivity, efficiency, and rationalization, not only into economic production practices but also into the most private spheres of American households. Home economics and the early food studies programs spread the idea that practices of homemaking and nutrition should also be considered as economic transactions to be calculated, monitored, and optimized. The unifying power that lay in this shared project of making "progress" cannot be underestimated.

Early on, land-grant institutions, like their older private counterparts, expressed specifically American democratic notions. Historian Robert Glidden highlights the link between education and fundamental beliefs about the United States as a land of opportunity, "a place where one can get ahead and elevate his or her station in life by industriousness and creativity. This is called the American Dream. The American ideal."[11] Unlike in Europe, where education traditionally signified a privilege reserved for elite classes, education became an embodiment of this ideal, enabling quality of life and social mobility. Another fundamental aspect of education from early on was the "service aspect, which we would consider part of civic virtue and which reminds each citizen to give back to the society that created the American dream and personal opportunity."[12] While these ideals were undergirded by social and moral injustices that arguably lie just as much at the heart of American history, the republican spirit nevertheless was "compounded of four fundamental beliefs[:]" that education was crucial to the vitality of the Republic, that proper democratic education consists of the diffusion of knowledge, that education must nurture virtue, and that learning itself should be cultivated.[13]

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[9] Allan Nevins, *The State Universities and Democracy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 10f.
[10] Cf. Daniel Fallon, "Differentiation by Role and Mission of Institutions of Higher Education in the United States," in *German and American Higher Education. Educational Philosophies and Political Systems*, eds. Helmbrecht Breinig, Jürgen Gebhardt, and Berndt Ostendorf (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2001), 82.
[11] Robert Glidden, "Mobility and Service: The Dual Role of Higher Education in U.S. Society," in *German and American Higher Education. Educational Philosophies and Political Systems*, eds. Helmbrecht Breinig, Jürgen Gebhardt, and Berndt Ostendorf (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2001), 111.
[12] Ibid. 112.
[13] Ibid.

Land grants signified an effort to establish higher education sites across regions far away from the private educational hubs of the east coast, many of whom feared the competition of publicly subsidized higher education.[14] Establishing educational sites was fundamental to the project of nation building, and with that, to the westward expansion. As more people migrated west, moving into areas that had until recently been home to native peoples, settler colonial agents relied on the foundation of institutions to solidify the permanence of their presence. The system also helped strengthen federal-state partnerships through joint educational research and outreach work.[15] During the Reconstruction era, separate land-grant colleges for African Americans were established in segregated states when, ironically, the second Morrill Act prohibited racial discrimination in admission practices. A state could bypass this provision "by establishing separate institutions for white and black students if the funds were 'equitably,' but not necessarily equally, divided between the institutions."[16] In spite of the financial discrepancy built into this structure and the injustices that arose from this, significant Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) like the North Carolina Agricultural & Technical College (established 1891) and Fort Valley State University in Georgia (established 1895) find their origins in this provision.[17]

Toward the end of the 19th century, as the United States was rapidly industrializing and urbanizing, agriculture had to transform as well. In fact, in many ways, these two transformations can be seen as a symbiotic process, rather than two distinct and separate developments. While urban centers became industrial production hubs, agriculture also needed to become mechanized and more efficient. In order to drive this development according to distinct environmental and economic agrarian interests, the 1887 Hatch Act established agricultural experimental stations at land-grant colleges and universities. This expanded scientific research efforts benefitting local agricultural practices.[18] As a result, at the turn of the 20th century, farming across the United States was changing dramatically and altering the character of agriculture, which for so long had served as the mythical backbone of the

[14] Along with others, Harvard president Charles W. Eliot voiced considerable opposition to the "legislative influence […] detrimental to academic development," which ultimately led to a severing of ties between Harvard University and the state of Massachusetts. This move was followed by most other private charters. Cf. Fallon, 82.
[15] Cf. National Research Council. *Colleges of Agriculture at the Land Grant Universities: Public Service and Public Policy* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 1996), 14. https://doi.org/10.17226/5133.
[16] Wayne D. Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People. Seventy-five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 24.
[17] Cf. Marcie Cohen Ferris, *The Edible South. The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 108.
[18] Cf. Gale A. Buchanan, *Feeding the World. Agricultural Research in the Twenty-First Century* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2016), 36f.

construction of American selves and identities, as well as the nation's economy. Small farms in many regions relied extensively on family labor. While labor was organized in multigenerational, contingent, and sprawling ways, "such farms loosely resembled the contemporary ideal of 'family farms.'"[19] The push toward mechanization favored large-scale farms over the majority of poor farmers, such as tenants, sharecroppers, and wage laborers. Investors, reformers, and technocrats championed large-scale operations characterized by managerial and standardized processes, uniform products, and efficient production methods. To them, this "industrial ideal" signified progress and efficiency, making agriculture more "scientific" and "businesslike" as opposed to the artisanal, labor-intensive production methods of the 19th century.[20]

Overall, land-grant colleges and universities were integral parts of building and institutionalizing a democratic republic that envisioned the progress of the country as one driven by modern, mechanized, and efficient economic production. A benevolent state distributed land in settler colonial fashion to agents of its own interests, providing the means to disseminate knowledge that is in tune with its own agenda. The idea of progress through education was intrinsically tied to an effort to permanently settle and institutionalize these places. Driven by economic goals of spreading mechanization and industrialization beyond the urban centers, land-grant colleges and universities, and their agricultural experimentation stations established and rooted these incentives across the United States, and especially in the western states that were becoming the destination of more and more Americans. One must not forget that underneath these developments, which have often been narrated as great success stories in the process of industrializing capitalism, lie the social and environmental re-makings of lands that had previously been occupied by indigenous peoples and communities. From this perspective, land-grant colleges and their aid in educating and economically uplifting struggling rural communities are intrinsically tied to the institutional violence of settler colonialism as it worked to permanently claim land.

However, this fundamental economic transformation did not come about uncontested. As urban areas faced significant social stratification and rising inequality, which often erupted into strikes and violent riots (see below), the agrarian moral character of the United States that had once formed a core ideal of Jeffersonian democracy came under increasing pressure. The small-scale, independent farmer who, in Jefferson's vision, had counteracted the corruption of

[19] Gabriel N. Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 4f.
[20] Ibid., 5.

urban centers through his honest labor, was quickly becoming outdated in the push for ever-larger farms that would maximize production outputs as well as profits. Remaking farming into a business as opposed to a way of life undermined small-scale operations and the identities rooted in them alike. Initially, the populist movement served as a platform for poor farmers to voice their opposition to the changing zeitgeist. Calls for structural reforms that would counter the privileging of wealthy and large-scale operations enjoyed popularity during the first two decades of the 20th century. Suspicion of government-sponsored agricultural education and research grew in reaction to the favoring of capital-intensive and mechanized production methods. Alienation of small-scale farmers was somewhat mitigated through the American Farm Bureau Federation; however, farmers in the South remained disinterested in capitalization and continued to rely on labor-intensive production methods.[21]

Agriculture, Youth, and Reform

In 1914, progress had to be defended in the eyes of Congress. The best way to guarantee economic stability and growth, the body found, would be to foster and increase efficiency in the agricultural sector. The Smith-Lever Act established an institutional basis for cooperation between the USDA and land-grant colleges and universities in the form of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES). The triad structure of teaching, research, and outreach, which had first been developed by private higher education institutions to complement the democratic character of the young nation in the late 18th century, had now been introduced into public institutions. The CES's objective was to disseminate knowledge produced at land-grant institutions, as well as new technologies, to rural communities. Bypassing the skepticism that would arise if they pursued overtly top-down strategies, the extension service focused on practice-oriented, relatable, and personal outreach work. In this way, the CES represented a link between the USDA, state research institutions, private companies producing machinery, and farmers who now became consumers as well as producers. The objective of economic development central to the establishment of the CES interweaved public and private interests, which shaped the American economy throughout the 20th century. As the Committee on the Future of the Colleges of Agriculture in the Land Grant University System noted: "Throughout their history, land grant colleges of agriculture have a unique relationship with the federal

[21] Cf. Rosenberg, 6.

government and a special responsibility to the public."[22] Here, public service operates to transfer technology and education to the public, connecting people with the institutions that otherwise operate in ways that are often inaccessible for rural communities. The relationships that were established between the public and state educational institutions enabled the latter to access rural farming operations and establish ways to influence, shape and govern domestic household activities and farming operations.

However, the USDA knew that the undertaking of not only accessing farming communities but also gaining their cooperation in order to reach into their production methods, would be neither easy nor quick. Distrust and skepticism toward political and educational elites needed to be overcome in an effective and lasting way, and youth work had proven to be the most promising strategy. After all, in teaching farmers to think like businesspeople, what would be more fundamental than instilling this logic in their minds from early on? The USDA had taken rural youth clubs under its auspices as early as 1907 and had found working with youth in farming communities to be relatively uncomplicated and successful in "strengthen[ing] connections between rural Americans and the 1862 land-grant colleges."[23] This is why the Smith-Lever Act also entailed a provision that institutionalized a youth organization, *4-H*, within the new extension system. As Gabriel N. Rosenberg notes in his in-depth study of the organization, "4-H developed as an integral part of this broader push toward mechanized, industry-backed agriculture and the politics of progressive agricultural reform that eventually rendered rural America safe for agribusiness."[24] Clubs, contests, and home demonstrations became popular formats for agricultural progressives to teach rural youth their ideas of agricultural progress.

The organization's premise was built on educational programs "of an 'informal, non-resident, problem-oriented nature.'" This framing directed the engagement of state agents toward building interpersonal relationships with rural families in intimate settings. The *informality* of these engagements created a relatable atmosphere: by locating classes and workshops in private, sometimes improvised facilities and structuring learning experiences not as hierarchical classroom engagements but interactive social interactions, the institutional structure became less palpable and conspicuous for participants, as well as the parents who had signed their children up. Furthermore, the widespread use of community members as

[22] National Research Council, *Colleges of Agriculture*…, 14.
[23] Carmen V. Harris, "States' Rights, Federal Bureaucrats, and Segregated 4-H Camps in the United States. 1927-1969," *Journal of African American History* 93:3 (Summer 2008), 364.
[24] Cf. Rosenberg, 6.

volunteers provided technocratic expertise with a nonthreatening, relatable image.[25] Overall, this informal set-up served to by-pass the traditional state-skepticism that many Americans harbor and that is particularly present in rural communities. The engagement of *non-locals* further facilitated this effect, as instructors would not engage with and reproduce local discourses critical of public institutions. In this way, the structure entailed a separation between local communities as the addressees of state values and interests and the institution as represented by relatable individual instructors who remained by and large spatially and socially separated from the communities they were shaping.

Lastly, 4-H programs were directed to be *problem-oriented*. However, the premise does not reveal what the agency regarded as the *problem(s)* to be addressed. An answer to this question can be found by looking at what kinds of programs were being offered and to whom: the programs were segregated along racial and gender lines, which reflected the overall structure of the extension system. Commenting on extension work in the South, Marcie Cohen Ferris points out that this structure produced new opportunities for black and white women. Domestic sciences and home economics were increasingly taught at colleges and provided women with access to education and professional work.[26] At the same time, these opportunities also provided the state with new ways to reach into communities and the private lives within them, and alter the everyday lives of people according to the values and interests of proponents of technocratic management. While 4-H clubs offered programs for girls in which they learned homemaking and skills and crafts, rural women were educated in state-of-the art gardening, food preservation, and marketing skills. Through this engagement, "female agents could scrutinize and intervene in the most private aspects of family life — from how a woman prepared meals, preserved food, and arranged her kitchen, to how she dressed, raised her children, and kept flies and rodents out of her house."[27] The 4-H club work mirrored these gendered operations and further cemented images of women as homemakers in the minds of young girls. Classes in knitting and home vegetable production proved popular and almost no girls participated in agricultural projects focusing on revenue production. Boys, on the other hand, were preparing for the intricacies of capital-intensive mono-cropping, learning from a young age that efficient production methods producing high yields were the best aims of a farming operation. Male enrollment was clustered around agricultural production (like Corn Clubs) and animal husbandry programs (like Pig Clubs), with almost no boys participating in

[25] Ibid.
[26] Cf. Cohen Ferris, 151.
[27] Ibid., 154.

home economics projects.[28] While the segregation along gender and racial lines provided new professional opportunities for black women and female extension workers, these structures also served to reproduce and strengthen gender roles in rural communities. By implementing a gendered education structure that targeted young girls and boys, 4-H effectively engaged in social engineering that reproduced and cemented heteronormative values. By 1920, 4-H had become a reliable ally for the USDA in disseminating its preferred production methods. The bond between technocratic expertise, private capital, and local volunteer leaders grew stronger and could soon be found in the form of 4-H club work across rural America. Areas showing a predominance of labor-intensive farming practices in particular soon became hubs for 4-H clubs. Enrollment was highest in densely populated regions, as shorter travel distances facilitated participation. New England, the Deep South, and the eastern Corn Belt showed high enrollment rates among rural youth. The Great Lakes region took the crown with enrollment rates of between a quarter and a third of rural youth by 1940. Through the support of the farm bureau and progressive agriculturalists, youth acquired the intellectual and practical knowledge of how to farm and live like businesspeople.[29]

Overall, the 4-H programs proved to be highly adaptive to different regional specificities as well as racial settings. Whereas the public image of 4-H failed to represent black participation, USDA statistics show that this white-washed depiction did not reflect the reality of 4-H enrollment. Almost all black youth enrolled in Kentucky, West Virginia, Missouri, and Maryland. In these former states of the Confederacy, 4-H club work operated in terms of racial segregation, with "negro" extension services being run out of black land-grant colleges.[30] It is noteworthy that, until 1967, the federal state did not contribute funding to the extension services of these institutions. Even then, and in contrast to white land grants, this federal funding did not come with a mandate for states to match the federal grants with state appropriations.[31] The legacy of the so called "1890 institutions" (in reference to the 1890 Morrill Act that installed segregated institutions and created the system of unequal funding) produced stark financial disparities between black and white extension services, with black extension services often ending up understaffed, underpaid, and under-equipped.[32]

During the 1960s, the social advances that the civil rights movement had been fighting

[28] Cf. Rosenberg, 7.
[29] Ibid., 6f.
[30] Ibid., 8.
[31] Cf. Scott Jaschik, "For the Nation's 17 Black Land-Grant Colleges, Unique Difficulties and New Strategies," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 34, No. 9 (1987), 31f.
[32] Ibid., 8.

for started to reach the USDA. Progress, however, came at a very slow pace. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights criticized how "the Department has generally failed to assume responsibility for assuring equal opportunity and equal treatment to all those entitled to benefit from its programs." Instead, "local patterns of racial segregation and discrimination"[33] characterized the agency's dealings. Neither the Civil Rights Act of 1964, nor the detailed recommendations of the Civil Rights Commission in 1968 managed to change the USDA's institutional discrimination against black farmers. During the 1970s and 80s, special legislation was passed to "address the historic injustices that that ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged rural minorities had endured under previous legislation."[34] However, institutional racism continued: in 1999, in the settlement of the largest class-action lawsuit based on civil rights violations in U.S. history (*Pigford v. Glickman*), the USDA acknowledged its discrimination against black farmers between 1981 and 1996.[35]

While the USDA was reluctant to take action, the 4-H organization slowly started to change and expand its focus in the 1960s. The goal of the new approach was to expand participation beyond the traditional stronghold of 4-H in rural areas. This included expansion into rural areas that had been struggling from economic deprivation, but, more importantly, it meant a strong push into urban areas, where the organization saw the highest concentration of black youth and youth living in poverty.[36] The Federal Extension Service conducted a study of 4-H activities and potentials for urban expansion. A series of national conferences continued the investigation and spread the new idea to hundreds of 4-H youth agents. In 1966, for example, a national seminar involving 4-H personnel from 46 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C. took place in the nation's capital. Speaking to the audience, Chairman of the Planning Committee Dr. T.L. Walton, Jr. urged 4-H to address the needs of "disadvantaged youth […] with meaningful programs." To him, 4-H had been neglectful and needed to take on "its rightful place as a vital force in bringing more youth into the mainstream of society, regardless of where they may live or their socioeconomic position."[37] The Cooperative Extension Service as a whole urgently needed "to assume increasing responsibility for providing purposeful and effective 4-H programs for segments of the American youth

[33] The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights quoted in Debra A. Reid, "African Americans and Land Loss in Texas: Government Duplicity and Discrimination Based on Race and Class," *Agricultural History* 77, no. 2 (Spring, 2003), 262.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 262f.
[36] Cf. T.L. Walton, Jr., "Program Development Studies Urban Areas 1966," opening comments, (Washington, DC: Extension Administration, 1966), Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.
[37] Ibid.

population not adequately served."[38] Indeed, while 4-H was the largest federal youth program, by 1966 enrollment of 10- to 19-year-olds had stagnated at under 10 percent ,and under 1 percent in urban areas.[39] To the agency, this constituted a problem that needed to be addressed and solved. As the core mission of 4-H was to serve the public, its underrepresentation in cities signified a threat to the organization's dominance in youth work to some: "Our growing awareness that far too many disadvantaged and urban youth have not been reached by any youth program now challenges 4-H to retain its predominant position by carrying its program into the lives of these neglected youth."[40] Within the logic of this institutional thinking, 4-H underrepresentation in cities signified a threat to its *dominance* in the field of youth work, which highlights the organization's self-conception as a righteous entity.

The 4-H effort to move into urban areas, however, did not start from zero. Several U.S. cities had already seen 4-H activity, albeit on a fairly low level. In 1968, an internal paper on 4-H programs in urban areas highlighted the long history of the organization. Portland, Oregon, for example, had seen 4-H activity going back to 1914. Overall, 200 cities were home to 4-H programs that almost exclusively focused on public housing projects. Some 400 public housing communities, many of them black, were subject to 4-H's efforts to intervene and reform their lives, values, and conduct. Geographically, New England and the region now known as the Rust Belt saw the highest concentration of the early urban 4-H programs.[41] Volunteers ran most of these efforts, facilitating low costs for running operations. The programs themselves bore remarkable similarities to their rural counterparts, focusing on skills that would prepare children for household and family lives that followed 4-H's rural ideal. In Flint, Michigan, children were taught "skills in clothing, woodworking, gardening, and crafts." In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, participants were "encouraged to try new foods, practice table manners, learn to share, and accept responsibility."[42] Gardening, horticulture, and landscaping workshops were integral parts of these social reformist activities.

During World War II, 4-H had increased its urban activities. During this time, the youth

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Cf. Robert J. Pitchell, "The Challenge to Cooperative Extension for Expanding 4-H," study (Washington, DC: Extension Administration, 1966), Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.
[40] Ibid.
[41] The paper specifically mentions these major cities: Philadelphia, Chicago, Denver, Portland (OR), Kansas City, St. Louis, Minneapolis-St.Paul, Milwaukee, Gary, Indianapolis, East Chicago, Cleveland, Wilmington, Trenton, Newark, Paterson, Camden, Morris-Manchester, Concord (NH), Buffalo, Syracuse, Rochester, Nassau County (NY), Hartford, and New Haven (CT)
[42] Federal Extension Service, "4-H in the cities," report (Washington, DC: Federal Extension Service, 1968) Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.

organization proved adaptable to the changing political climate by promoting "democratic practices and symbolic nationalism."[43] Once again, crop cultivation was instrumental in the re-invention of the organization's activities. Now technocratic expertise was serving the war effort. Across American cities, Victory Gardens began to grow as Americans took up this form of private military service toaid the transforming food economy. 4-H agents across the country worked to transmit this new patriotic duty of gardening to youth and children, urging them "to use all tillable soil to cultivate victory gardens to feed hungry soldiers and civilians alike,"[44] as the Director of Michigan 4-H Youth Programs Michael J. Tate would later put it. As black and white youth were flocking to gardens to serve their country on the home front, 4-H was preaching democratic values while simultaneously preserving racial segregation within its own programs.[45]

In spite of African American efforts to desegregate 4-H in the 1950s, the practice continued unabated well into the 1960s. According to Gabriel N. Rosenberg, this was not due to a lack of interest in racial equality on the part of USDA bureaucrats, but rather that "they could not and would not conceive of 4-H as an instrument of racial justice."[46] As suburbanization was taking a toll on American cities, more and more black people found themselves trapped within city lines and in growing poverty. Civil unrest formed in reaction to these worsening and radicalized conditions. Within this sociopolitical climate, 4-H was urged to intervene in the urban crisis that was emerging across the country. However, the incentives to do so came less from within the organization. As archival sources show, public-private entanglements drove 4-H's urbanization. An internal report from 1968 states:

> Private business - local, regional, and national - has long supported 4-H in its more traditional role of working with rural youth. Recently[,] some of the nation's major business corporations, who support 4-H through the National 4-H Service Committee strongly recommended that 4-H expand its programs in urban areas. They offered their combined services in encouraging significant increases in both public and private financial support for urban 4-H work.[47]

While the youth programs had been proven to be highly adaptable to different rural communities, the move into urban areas signified a challenge to the 4-H institution overall. Black and rural youth engaged in segregated 4-H programs, but the move to address urban

[43] Rosenberg, 154.
[44] Michael J. Tate, "State's Urban, Rural Kids Find Common Bond in 4-H," *Detroit Free Press*, Feb 9, 1987.
[45] Cf. Rosenberg, 154-185.
[46] Ibid., 181.
[47] FES, "4-H in the cities."

audiences would now entail a number of white extension agents moving into black and urban communities. Following the technocratic logic of the institution, many questions arose from this new situation. How could extension agents make sense of the different spatial conditions? How could rural programs be adapted to urban audiences? How were 4-H agents to approach these communities and how were they to conduct themselves to ensure the successful establishment of urban youth programs? What needs did these communities have, and how could they be met through workshops that constituted the core agenda of such extension work? As the same 1968 report notes, the organization "need[ed] to provide practical, 'real-life' experiences to disadvantaged youth."[48] But in order to cater to this new audience and the new spaces they were inhabiting, the institution first had to find out what these *practical* and *real-life experiences* could be and how they could be applied. As I explore in chapter IV, an extensive investigation into urban, poor, and black communities unfolded. The intellectual force of the Extension Service, and researchers from land-grant colleges and universities researchers set out to make sense of this issue.

The Origins of Urban Crisis

As the United States was transforming from an agricultural society to an increasingly industrializing and urbanizing society, wage labor outside the home came to structure and dominate the lives of Americans. A new vision of urban modernity began to take shape. While the Homestead Act of 1862 reignited the agrarian dreams of "landed independence" for many who subsequently migrated west, urban industrial centers grew to produce their own visions of financial, material wealth, and mobility. In the post-bellum decades, the American industrial corridor stretching from the Atlantic to the Great Lakes grew dramatically and came to symbolize this new age. For the first time, farm property fell below the symbolic 50 percent threshold in the nation's total capital stock during the 1870s, and this happened despite the fact that the Homestead Act created almost 400,000 farms between 1862 and 1890. In the 1880s, the number of agricultural laborers fell below the same symbolic mark, while manufacturing steadily rose to the top of the total national economic output.[49] And yet, behind these astonishing numbers, many saw themselves facing a new underbelly. The *Gilded Age*, as it

[48] Ibid.
[49] Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 155.

became known, offered success and financial security only to some, while the larger picture of these transformations started to reveal a growing socioeconomic stratification in urban centers. Recessions and depressions in the early 1870s and mid-1880s hit the underprivileged hard and countless labor unrests broke out. Wage cuts, reduced hours, and lay-offs, as well as a surplus of laborers due to internal migration and immigration, spurred growing class conflict and intersecting xenophobic, racist, and regionalist sentiments. Unions like the Knights of Labor (founded in 1877) formed in response to economic insecurities while strikes and riots, most famously the Haymarket Riot in 1886, uncovered the growing presence of poverty and unemployment in urban America. Many of those laborers who found employment worked in unsafe conditions and their wages were far from sufficient to cover the most basic needs for themselves and their families. Tenement houses built for maximum density usually became their homes. In 1890, Jacob Riis's photojournalistic work revealed to the largely oblivious middle and upper classes "How the Other Half Lives,"[50] decrying the social, physical, and moral decay of slum dwellers and pointing to the greed and neglect of the wealthy as causes.

As the Progressive Era saw widespread discussions on inequality and reform efforts to counteract such economic and social divergences, the growing complexities of an increasingly interconnected global system of capitalism amplified its volatility. When the Baring Brothers banking house in England failed in 1890, prices for American goods plummeted on the world market. Increasing speculation led to a series of the bankruptcies among American businesses and railroad companies. In late 1893, the stock market crashed. Again, workers bore the brunt of the economic turmoil, and charitable organizations and municipal poorhouses were soon overwhelmed with applications. Homelessness and hunger spread quickly, demanding reactions. However, local elites were not primarily concerned by the political threat of the unemployed masses; their concern focused on the seemingly far more dangerous moral implications of "idleness." If out-of-work laborers could sustain themselves and their families through charity, low-paying and unsafe industrial jobs might not look so promising once the economy recovered from what was surely just a temporary downturn. In short, to them the lack of employment threatened to erode a most American value: the work ethic.

[50] Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives. Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (Carlisle: Applewood Books, 2011, originally published in 1890).

1893: The Birth of Urban Agriculture

Detroit's Mayor Hazen Pingree had already achieved some infamy by the time the panic hit the city. As a rapidly expanding industrial hub, Detroit's growth was marked by chaotic conditions: muddy streets, unsanitary marketplaces, and a sewage system that barely managed to navigate the flat and soggy topography. With little natural drainage, the conversion of swampy territory into a built urban environment posed significant challenges to construction companies, while standing water threatened the growing population with disease. These conditions were made worse by rampant corruption and private monopolies. Pingree, who had first gotten elected on an anti-corruption platform in 1889, tackled these issues by creating city-owned utilities companies that served as competitors and led to decreasing prices for services. Driven by the ambition to turn Detroit into the orderly and prestigious industrial metropolis his predecessors had envisioned but failed to create, Pingree became a pioneer of the budding progressive reform movement (*Progressive Era*). But while he was a hero to some, others saw him as a power-hungry despot, who crossed state constitutional boundaries[51] and threatened the freedom of market capitalism.

Pingree's engagement with urban inequality by addressing the misanthropic conditions of Detroit's environment was a constant throughout his tenure as mayor (1889-1897). When the Panic of 1893 hit the city, it was no different. And again, the boldness of his course of action sparked outrage in some and adoration in others. Reportedly, his urban agriculture program — the first in the nation — was conceived in the early days of the panic when Pingree went out riding with U.S. Army personnel to assess the state of his distressed city. One of the men, bearing the promising name Colonel Cornelius Gardener, "called the mayor's attention to idle land and suggested free garden spots for the needy."[52] Even in these early days of the urban capitalist order, city economies were plagued by speculators who left lots undeveloped, waiting for the right time to cash in on their investments. Why not use these spaces to look after the stomachs as well as the moral character of the urban underclass? The idea offered an exciting combination of critiquing the greed of speculators and "improving" the moral character of the poor — needless to say, Pingree was convinced on the spot. Gardener, he decided, should oversee the pioneering creation of the first urban agriculture program in America's history as chairman.

[51] Indeed, to the delight of his opponents, the Michigan Constitution prevented Pingree's attempt to create a municipal railway company after his efforts to negotiate lower fares for streetcars failed.
[52] "Detroit Veterans to Honor Originator of War Gardens," *Detroit Free Press,* October 3, 1918.

A Cure for Idleness: Poverty and Reform

Mayor Pingree of Detroit was presiding over a city of some 205,000 residents and over six thousand acres of unoccupied land when he proposed this measure. One-fifth of the residents were of Polish origin, the majority of whom worked as day laborers who were hit especially hard when the panic unfolded.[53] Municipal facilities and private charities were quickly overwhelmed by the crisis, and xenophobic tendencies amplified fears of moral decay. Somewhat naively, Pingree assumed that landowners would gladly donate their idle land, and that the poor would happily participate in such a program. So he went forward and asked for contributions from the public to purchase plows, tools, and seeds. The plan backfired. Pingree drew considerable ridicule, hostility even. At a time when cities were becoming spaces of a modern imagination that promised to leave the hardship of rural agrarianism behind, his idea clashed with the zeitgeist. During a service at a popular Presbyterian church, its pastor reportedly invited the congregation to "give liberally and pray that potatoes might grow as had the …[mayor's] head and then there would not be a single hungry child left in Detroit."[54] Additionally, local elites were suspicious. Pingree was already known as a controversial social reformer. His plan implied an overreach by the government into private interests, such as land speculation, which seemed to threaten the freedom of landownership. Local papers printed cartoons depicting Pingree as "Tubor I.," a despot who carried a potato and carrot as orb and scepter,[55] and mockingly referred to his plan as "Pingree's potato patches." No less dramatic than the public responses, Pingree auctioned off his own prize horse in the center of the city, shaming wealthy Detroiters for their refusal to support his idea.

The drama created plenty of publicity for Pingree's undertaking. News of the *Detroit Experiment* spread across the nation as local skepticism and even boycotts continued. In spite of the adverse reactions, Mayor Pingree managed to raise $3,600[56] and acquired 450 acres of land, mostly located near the city's edges. Social reformist ideas shaped the selection process for participants. Only those "deserving" of the opportunity, carrying sufficient responsibility and experiencing economic hardship, gained access to *Pingree's Potato Patches*. A foreman

[53] Cf. Laura J. Lawson, *City Bountiful. A Century of Community Gardening in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 24f.
[54] Quoted in Melvin G. Holli, *Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 71; Lawson, 25.
[55] Cf. Lawson, 25.
[56] $108,000 in today's value, cf: "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount - 1790 to Present", Measuring Worth.com, https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/ (accessed 14 January, 2020).

oversaw urban agricultural laborers and made sure, theft, vandalism, or neglect were kept off the premises.

These pioneering urban gardeners cultivated crops for home consumption but were also allowed to sell surplus food on local markets. During the program's inaugural year, Detroiters generated a food value of some $14,000.[57] By 1895, the city council was funding the program to the tune of $5,000, netting urban farmers around $45,000.[58] The following year, the program provided almost half of the city's families who depended on public relief with locally grown food. *Pingree's Potato Patches* became so popular, they reduced the city's welfare spending by 60 percent.[59] The unanticipated success of the program inspired a number of other American cities to experiment with urban agriculture. Boston, New York City, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Seattle established especially fruitful vacant-lot cultivation schemes. By 1897, most cities had recovered from the panic and along with the temporary relief measures, urban fields waned. The idea of food relief and social reform through urban agricultural programs had seen its first promising invention. Many more would follow.

Relief and Subsistence: Depression-Era Gardens (1931-1937)

When the American stock market took a downturn in October 1929, few expected the temporal, sociopolitical, or economic extent of the ensuing crisis that became known as the *Great Depression*. Yet, the laissez-faire spirit that had dominated the American economy during the first decades of the century finally caught up with investors, bankers, and soon enough, average citizens who had entrusted banks with their savings. As purchasing power decreased, President Herbert Hoover was reluctant to use his power to protect workers from cutbacks and bet on a voluntary strategy. Its failure, subsequently skyrocketing unemployment numbers, and a general perception of President Hoover as inactive in face of the crisis led to a landslide victory for Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932, who had run on a platform that promised American voters a "New Deal" to fix the economy. The transformations that followed would reshape more than the country's economy: Deeply held beliefs about free enterprise and the assumedly infinite possibilities of economic success were shaken to the core. And with this seismic shock, previous fundamental convictions about the benevolence of free-market elites, as well as the

[57] $422,000 in today's value, cf: "Seven Ways…"
[58] $1.35m in today's value, cf: "Seven Ways…"
[59] Cf. Lawson, 24-26.

personal responsibilities of the underclass, began to show fissures. Keynesian economic planning and the American welfare system would emerge from these rifts. Furthermore, as unemployment numbers were skyrocketing — in 1931 six million were unemployed; by 1933 the number had risen to fifteen million — sociocultural conceptions about poverty started to change. Whereas previously, poverty and unemployment were widely regarded as resulting from personal flaws, they now began to signify a reflection of a volatile and unreliable economic system. This changed the social discourse on welfare, which had previously focused on separating those who "deserved" assistance from those who did not. The new question that emerged now was: how could relief be offered on a large scale without discouraging personal initiative and self-help?[60]

For many Americans who were struggling to find work and feed themselves and their dependents, gardening programs became significant approaches to this question. Especially during the early years of the *Great Depression*, from approximately 1931-1935, myriad local programs that followed the same basic structure of earlier endeavors started to sprout: They distributed land, information, and materials for crop cultivation to people in need. Federal coordination remained absent and federal funding for garden projects was only made available in 1934 and 1935, which contributed to the diversity of programs, organizers, and nomenclature. Civic clubs, municipal agencies, charitable organizations, and corporations initiated thrift gardens, self-help gardens, subsistence gardens, employment gardens, industrial gardens, and community gardens across the nation. These projects aimed to simultaneously occupy the unemployed, counteracting the psychological effects of unemployment, and increase food access.[61] In contrast to earlier programs, financial relief through the sale of surplus crops was discouraged. Instead, programs promoted "gardening for family food needs and collective gardening as a works project, with the produce generally used by relief organizations."[62] This meant that domestic crop cultivation was contained as an emergency measure that would provide food and labor without posing as economic competition to rural farmers who were hit hardest by the depression. As with the later Food Stamp Program (1939), which aimed primarily at increasing agricultural profitability,[63] the undernourished urban poor remained an afterthought for the federal government.

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[60] Cf. Nancy Isenberg, "Forgotten Men and Poor Folk: Downward Mobility and the Great Depression," in *White Trash. The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 206-230; Lawson, 146f.
[61] Cf. Lawson, 145-149.
[62] Ibid., 145.
[63] Cf. David M. Kennedy, *Over Here. The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 204.

Overall, two types of programs can be identified during this period: the work-relief garden and the subsistence garden. The former were usually run by local agencies that paid relief clients to garden and owned the harvested produce, which the agencies would typically distribute as food relief either directly or through other institutions. In twenty-two states across the nation, 17,196 acres of work-relief gardens existed in 1934. By the following year, these numbers had grown to 26,531 acres in twenty-eight states. However, while work-relief gardens offered more efficient crop production, cultural reservations about such collective, unambitious endeavors that seemed to clash with notions of individualism and competition persisted. A report on garden programs by the Russell Sage Foundation reflected such sentiments and "concluded with a preference for subsistence garden projects. Indeed, as the Depression continued, state and federal reports focused increasingly on the subsistence garden format, and work relief shifted to other types of projects."[64] Unsurprisingly then, subsistence garden programs were far more common than work-relief gardens. These provided land, information, and technical assistance, as well as seeds and occasionally tools and fertilizers, to individual households. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), which originated in President Roosevelt's early days in office and aimed at coordinating and increasing direct federal unemployment assistance to the states,[65] maintained data on subsistence gardens. The agency divided such programs into four categories: home vacant-lot gardens, community gardens, municipal gardens organized by local agencies, and industrial gardens that were sponsored by businesses or factories for the use of current and former employees. With a reported 1,673,173 sites in 1934, home and vacant-lot gardens were by far the most popular.[66]

Detroit Thrift Gardens

As an industrial city, Detroit was hit particularly hard by the *Great Depression* and became one of the first American cities to implement an urban agriculture program. While the severe and swift impact of the crisis certainly contributed to this fact, the city's local history as a pioneer in urban agriculture inspired the renewed activity. Detroit Mayor Frank Murphy reportedly read about *Pingree's Potato Patches,* which inspired him to implement a vacant-lot cultivation program in early 1931: *Detroit Thrift Gardens*. By naming the daughter of Hazen

[64] Lawson, 148.
[65] Cf. Kennedy, 144f.
[66] FERA recorded 107,205 community gardens, 31,396 municipal gardens, and 8,889 industrial gardens for the same year. Cf. Lawson, 149.

Pingree, Hazel Pingree Depew, as honorary chair, Mayor Murphy established a visible reference to the *Pingree Potato Patches*, and the program's success soon mirrored its historical antecedent when it became one of the most popular unemployment initiatives. In its inaugural year, 300 acres of land were divided up into 2,765 thrift gardens that fed 4,369 Detroiters. An additional 1,604 home gardens profited from the program. The numbers increased to some 6,600 gardens covering 400 acres of Detroit land in 1932, and by 1933, some 10,000 locals benefited from the program's harvests.[67] Local civic leaders initially led the effort as part of the Unemployment Committee (MUC); later it became part of FERA. As in earlier times, the main objectives lay in identifying appropriate spaces for crop cultivation, making them accessible to participants, and supplying materials like seeds and tools. Support was given to smaller ventures in home gardens downtown, but the main goal was to establish large gardens on the city's fringe, as had been the focus some forty years earlier. This proved to be challenging for a number of reasons. Environmental historian Joseph Cialdella notes, "[s]ince Pingree's time, however, Detroit had grown. The edges of Grand Boulevard, where many of the Potato Patches were located, once marked the outer boundary of the city. Now, it was well within the city limits, meaning large garden plots were located even farther out."[68] This meant that participants needed to travel further to reach their plots, the means to do which they were often lacking, and the *Thrift Garden* program needed to organize transportation to and from garden spaces. One participant also noted that soil conditions in these areas were poorer than they had been on the *Pingree Patches*, which increased the need for proper cultivation knowledge (supplied by extension agents of the Michigan State College) and material improvements of soil conditions through commercial fertilizers and stockyard manure. Tomato and cabbage transplants, as well as seeds for vegetables like radish, beets, kohlrabi, Swiss chard, kale, squash, turnips, okra, and parsley, were given to thrift gardeners and home gardeners. The municipality further supported thrift gardening by providing insecticides, tool lending services, and busses for transportation, and granting access to water via fire hydrants.[69]

Within the sociocultural climate of severe economic crisis, the ideological significance of *Detroit Thrift Gardens* took on a particular role that strayed from earlier interpretations of poverty. Where "idleness" had signified a moral hazard to individual characters, Mayor Murphy and the Thrift Garden Committee now feared "[t]he psychological effect of idleness

[67] Cf. Joseph Stanhope Cialdella, *Gardens in the Machine. Cultural and Environmental Change in Detroit, 1879 – 2010*" (PhD diss., unpublished, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2015), 162f.
[68] Cialdella, 160.
[69] Cf. Cialdella, 160-163; Detroit Historical Society, "Thrift Gardens," in *DHSdigital* (December 4, 2012), online: https://detroithistorical.wordpress.com/2012/12/04/thrift-gardens/ (accessed 14 Jan, 2020).

of large groups of our people," which to them endangered "the safety and morale of the country." This time, the danger rested in "funny ideas" that would corrupt "the minds of our unemployed" and corrupt their sense of "self-respect." Urban agricultural labor would prevent this, so the *Thrift Garden* supervisor continued, and once the crisis passed, participants would thus be able to be "the same industrious law-abiding citizens they were before."[70] The supervisor mirrored cultural fears about a breakdown of law and order, as the 1932 movie *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* suggested to popular audiences across the nation. In it, the main protagonist, James Allen (Paul Muni), starts out as a patriotic and ambitious man, who finds himself unemployed and subsequently embarks on a downward spiral as tramp, convict, and ultimately, fugitive. In the film's emotionally disturbing final scene, Allen admits that his only hope for survival rests in stealing food.[71] Based on the true story of Robert Elliott Burns's imprisonment in the 1920s, the film could have revealed to audiences what historian James Patterson has called "old poverty":[72] some forty million Americans who were barely surviving even during the relative prosperity of the 1920s, most of them elderly, rural, and including essentially all Blacks and People of Colour. Instead, the film featured a white, male lead, who now helped those Americans who had previously never seen such precarity or been aware that it existed in their country, let alone been affected by it themselves, make sense of the Depression.[73]

While fears about lawlessness ran high, Detroit's Thrift Garden Committee rested its hopes in the powers of social reform. As one committee member confidently stated: "There will be many discouraging features that will arrive but by aiding and educating many of these people, we believe that the effect will be far reaching, not only from the educational standpoint but will be something for the unemployed to take up to make use of their leisure time."[74] With such long-term goals in sight, the program's administrators implemented rigid rules and organizational structures that would inform the conduct of participants. Upon entry into the program, would-be gardeners had to sign a detailed pledge:[75]

I agree to plan a garden according to the prescribed garden diagram and to keep it in good condition, free from weeds, by cultivating it at least once a week during the season.

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[70] Thrift garden supervisor quoted in Sidney Fine, *Frank Murphy: The Detroit Years* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 284.
[71] Paul Muni, *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, DVD, Directed by Mervyn LeRoy (Burbank: Warner Bros., 1932).
[72] James Patterson, *America's Struggle against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: University of Harvard Press, 1994[3]), 38.
[73] Cf. Kennedy, 168.
[74] Quoted in Cialdella, 161.
[75] Lawson, 166f.

I agree to keep a record of the amount of produce harvested and will make a summary report of my garden at the close of the season and send it to Detroit thrift gardens.

I agree to consider the rights of others and to do all in my power to protect my neighbor's garden from harm as well as my own, and further agree to avoid damage to sidewalks, trees, or any other improvement.

I agree not to sell or transfer my garden privilege.

I agree that I will not offer for sale on the general market the products of my garden.

I agree to wear my badge, which shall be provided by the Detroit thrift gardens, in a conspicuous place, at all times that I am working on my garden.

I agree to forfeit all rights and privileges of my garden if I fail to comply with the above rules and regulations.

Similar to the *Pingree Potato Patches*, Detroit's thrift gardens contained a regimen of social control. Overseers, who were made special officers of the city's police department and were even given the authority to make arrests, supervised all gardening activities during the day and made sure that no unauthorized persons stepped on the garden premises. Night watches were organized by thrift gardeners themselves. As I explore in the next chapter, theft and vandalism had provided much excitement for Detroit's World War I gardens. This might have still lingered in administrators' minds. However, when we consider the racial and ethnic makeup of thrift gardeners, these regimens of control take on a different meaning. A report comprised by the program notes that "from one sample field of 134 gardeners there were the following nationalities: seven whites, thirty Negroes, one Austrian, two English, seven German, fifty Hungarian, two Italian, two Irish, three Lithuanian, three Mexican, one Ukrainian, two Polish, three Russian, one Serbian, and two Slavish. Other fields were of similar composition, there being no differentiation as to color, race, or creed."[76] The diverse composition of gardeners reflected the ethnic composition of the industrial city that had long attracted migrants and immigrants with its abundance of low- and semi-skilled industrial jobs. This suggests that while imaginations around poverty and its supposed moral implications was shifting, underlying xenophobic sentiments persisted.

Urban Homesteads

Out of the economic and sociocultural upheavals of the Depression emerged a new vision: the *Subsistence Homestead*. Intended to relieve struggling industrial and farm workers, subsistence homesteads would provide affordable housing at low interest rates, in locations close to the

[76] Quoted in Cialdella, 164.

workplace, and on properties large enough to provide space for subsistence crop production. This would enable families to survive on low wages by limiting household spending. The idea referenced the *Homestead Acts* of the 1860s.[77] Back then, homestead applicants could gain ownership of land that was in the public domain or government-owned, provided they settled and worked on this land. Homesteading became a popular government tool to drive westward expansion and settler colonialism. As approximately ten percent of United States land was distributed through the Homestead Acts, the extent of the program was enormous, although many homesteaders struggled in their farming endeavors that were often far away from vital infrastructures. However, such struggles had long been forgotten when the *Subsistence Homestead Division* (SHD) was established by the Department of the Interior on August 23, 1933. The New Deal agency, equipped with $25 million,[78] put technocratic experts onto the task of designing a feasible program, but the challenges were numerous. If finding appropriate land close to industrial plants was challenging, accessing it was often impossible. In contrast to the original homesteads, whose aboriginal stewards had been displaced and their memory eradicated, urban homesteading clashed with established, private ownership. SHD economists worked out a carefully calculated plan that detailed the economically sustainable conditions for urban homesteading. Wm. E. Zeuch presented this plan at a joint meeting of the American Farm Economic Association and the Section on Rural Sociology of the American Sociological Society in Chicago on December 27, 1934. In his paper, Zeuch starts out by normalizing the idea of subsistence homesteads, arguing:[79]

> let us not think of subsistence homesteads as something new. The idea and the practice are hoary with age. I presume that subsistence gardens were inaugurated when the prehistoric mothers of mankind first began to plant wild fruits and roots about their camp tires or camping grounds rather than continue to risk their lives gathering fruits and roots in the tangled forest among ferocious beasts while their men folk were away hunting.

Then, he explains that the SHD is the "first conscious and deliberate attempt […] to promote, finance and build subsistence homesteads as a part of government policy"[80] in U.S. history. However, Zeuch explains, this had also been undertaken successfully by governments outside

[77] The first Homestead Act was passed in 1862. Four years later, the Southern Homestead Act followed. The 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act sought to make marginal land in the Great Plains farmable, which the 1916 Stock-Raising Homestead Act followed up on.
[78] $484 million in todays value, cf. "Seven Ways…".
[79] Wm. E. Zeuch, "The Subsistence Homestead Program from the Viewpoint of an Economist," paper presented at a joint meeting of the American Farm Economic Association, and the Section on Rural Sociology of the American Sociological Society (Chicago: December 27, 1934), 710.
[80] Ibid., 711.

the United States. His detailed justifications are attempts to universalize the idea of subsistence homesteads, which speaks to the skepticism he was anticipating. A closer look at an example helps to understand what Zeuch was up against.

In December 1933, the city of Mount Clemens, a suburb 18 miles outside Detroit, started an attempt to establish a subsistence homestead. The municipality took on two parcels of land, each one spanning approximately 350 acres, planning to submit them to the SHD.[81] In order to avoid financial responsibility for the project, the municipality set out to form a non-profit corporation that would file the official application for federal funding. "The application," explained the secretary of the local Board of Commerce, A.D. Brewer, "must be accompanied by a vast amount of detailed data, such as soil tests, drainage facilities, etc."[82] County Agricultural Extension Agents cooperated with the municipality to test the soil. A local architect drew up plans for "attractive small homes which, under the Government's [sic] plan, would be tenanted by responsible workmen, who would be given a long period of years in which to pay for their properties."[83] Many agreed that the idea of subsistence homesteads for struggling workers was in and of itself a sound idea. However, by February 1934, mounting skepticism as to the plan's feasibility arose. John F. Ballanger, head of the local County Relief Administration cautioned:[84]

> The theory of all this seems good, but a little study shows that the practical working out of the proposition is beset with innumerable problems […]. Nothing can be further from the truth than the old ideas that anyone can farm. To successfully raise farm crops now requires about as much knowledge, experience and skill as any occupation that can be named. A special committee […] reported an estimated cost of from $2,165 to $3,658 per family […]. Also the possibilities of adding to the woes of an already overburdened and overproductive agriculture might well be considered […].

Subsistence homesteads, thus, operated at the intersection of conflicts of interest, and administrative as well as educational challenges. If this did not supply enough roadblocks to halt the plan, mounting attacks on the federal level were soon to follow. In April 1934, allegations that subsistence homesteading was "communistic" were launched in a House of Representatives hearing. Some 15 years before the onset of the *Second Red Scare*, the charges nonetheless hit a sore point. Eleanor Roosevelt rushed to defend subsistence homesteading.

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[81] Cf. "Home Colony Options Taken: Mt. Clemens Seeking Federal Project," *Detroit Free Press*, December 29, 1933, 8.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] "Farmer's Enterprise Welfare Unit an Idea," *Detroit Free Press*, Feb. 2, 1934, 4.

"Never in this Country [sic] to my knowledge," she argued, "has it been considered Communistic [sic] for an opportunity to be given people to own their own living and buy their own house."[85] The prominent defense and its patriotic argument did enable subsistence homesteading to continue, but further administrative challenges, and prominent attacks were not far away.

The city of Detroit had been taking ample advantage of federal monies to drive slum clearance projects in the early 1930s. While the displacement of economically underprivileged parts of Detroit's society was commonly regarded as beneficial to the overall good of the city, subsistence homesteading offered a more wholesome alternative to public housing projects. It also offered the chance to move needy citizens to the outskirts of Detroit and beyond. Thus, in 1935, the city launched plans to submit its own application to the SHD.[86] Having learned from the previous public relations challenges, the plan entailed a $500,000 project backed by dozens of local businesses and corporations.[87] Such a public-private enterprise seemingly offered a way around allegations of government overreach. Yet, industrialist Henry Ford, whose influence had long surpassed the local economic realm, was unhappy with this initiative. Ford had been an avid devotee of farming and crop cultivation. His famous Dearborn estate contained large vegetable plots and flower gardens, as well as an orchard. Now, it seemed, he wanted to claim subsistence homesteading as his own. The subsistence homestead program "must be good because I myself have found it so difficult to do,"[88] Ford reportedly stated. In Detroit, his words went a long way, especially when backed up with actions. Ford had the parking lots of his factories in and around Detroit converted into subsistence gardens for automobile workers. Years earlier, he had even bought a 180-acre and a 550-acre property in upstate Michigan, planning (and failing) to turn them into workers' subsistence gardens.[89] However, in the end, Ford had little to worry about. Both, Detroit's and Mt. Clemens's applications were rejected by the SHD in early 1936.[90] Ultimately, the administrative roadblocks proved insurmountable.

[85] "Mrs. Roosevelt Terms Charge by Wirt Untrue, Declares Subsistence Homestead Plan Is Not Communistic," *Detroit Free Press*, April 12, 1934, 1.
[86] Cf. "Homes will be Built Up Outside City," *Detroit Free Press*, Mar. 17, 1935, 4.
[87] Cf. "$500,000 Subsistence Homestead Project Is Under Way," *Detroit Free Press*, Mar. 17, 1935, 4.
[88] "Roosevelt Asks National Plan, Not Cure-Alls," *Detroit Free Press*, Apr. 25, 1934, 1.
[89] Cf. "No Ford News At Gladstone," *The Escabana Daily Press*, Sept. 21, 1949, 8.
[90] Cf. Detroit Free Press, "RRA Abandons City Homesteads," *Detroit Free Press*, Jan. 7, 1936, 2.

III. Agrarian States of Exception: War Gardens in Detroit and Beyond (1917-1919 and 1942-1945)

Agrarian States of Exception

During both World Wars, gardening took on a vital role in American society. The food cultivation programs during the *Panic of 1893* and the *Great Depression* had targeted people across class lines but showed a focus on the middle class. Yet during the wartime periods, food cultivation in private gardens as well as on public lands became a patriotic duty that — for the time being — created moments of increasing equality between (mostly gendered) groups that hitherto had mostly cultivated social distinction. The fact that propaganda efforts during World War I advertised food preservation through the rhetorical frame of restraint, which often employed sacrificial language, served to strengthen such egalitarian currents. In contrast, the victory garden period of World War II was focused on maintaining quality of life and preserving household normalcy. Here, food cultivation programs focused on middle-class motifs, educating the public on nutrition and alternative nutrient sources, and portraying the practice as recreational activities that could bring families and neighbors together through shared experiences of labor.[1] During both national crises, citizens were urged to cultivate crops and help the national economy respond to increased food demands. Far-reaching propaganda efforts were undertaken by temporary wartime institutions to convince American women that it was their patriotic duty to abandon their roles as relatively passive consumers,[2] and instead develop more restrictive consumption patterns, and grow food.[3] This change affected the role white, and mostly middle-class, women could play within society as their gardens became extended public spheres in which they could perform and visually represent patriotic duty.[4] However, as I argue in this chapter, these emancipatory moments (as racially exclusive as they were), were temporary states of exception — socially, politically, and ecologically — and their exceptionality played a pivotal role in formulating a return to post-war "normalcy." The aesthetic and ecological temporality of crop gardens facilitated these exceptions. Unlike other material transformations of urban environments, such as construction, crop gardens leave very

[1] Cf. Laura J. Lawson, *City Bountiful. A Century of Community Gardening in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 115.
[2] Ann Douglas described the transition to an increasingly consumer-oriented economy in the 19th century as a "feminization of American Culture." With this terminology she characterizes the gendered relations of production and consumption, the latter entailing feminine passivity and female captivity within the domestic sphere. Cf. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*. (New York: Knopf, 1977).
[3] It is noteworthy that food preservation efforts were carried out by women's clubs who sent members door-to-door with pledge cards to convince fellow homemakers of their role within the war effort. This further highlights the role of women and the centrality of food in establishing the American home front.
[4] Cf. Rose Hayden-Smith, *Sowing the Seeds of Victory. American War Gardening Programs of World War I.* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 35-37.

little physical evidence of their existence unless they are preserved through human care taking. A transition to ornamental flower gardens is often perceived as more visually appealing, and it is also less labor intensive. It is unsurprising that after both wars, most crop gardens cultivated in the spirit of war garden programs were either transformed back into these representational spaces or abandoned altogether. While programs advocated food cultivation not exclusively in terms of food production — health benefits and recreational aspects also featured prominently in war garden propaganda, especially during World War II — the practice did not become a culturally valued practice in and of itself. This is important to note when we consider racial dimensions of crop cultivation, which take on increasing sociohistorical significance when we look at the age of urban crisis and beyond (see Chapters IV, V, and VI). Therefore, I will pay particular attention not just to white women, who are central characters in most narratives on World War I and World War II crop gardens, but also the histories of African Americans during these times, which have remained largely invisible in urban gardening histories.[5]

This chapter continues thematically by considering war gardening during both world wars. In order to contextualize domestic food production during each wartime economic transition, these larger histories serve as entry points. Detroit as an industrial hub played a significant and exceptional role during both periods, which in turn affected how local urban agriculture initiatives related to larger national efforts for war gardening. Simultaneously, the wartime economies fundamentally changed Detroit socially and culturally. The specific temporal and local context reveals how Detroiters, in such transformative times, engaged with their urban environment to meet national food production challenges and demonstrate their patriotic allegiances. Structurally, I have decided to keep the two periods separate for reasons of analytic clarity. The chapter ends with the city's post-war development, and the race and class issues that have shaped local politics and activism since then.

[5] Monica M. White's *Freedom Farmers* chronicles the history of African American farming in the South, community food resilience strategies that emerged from such projects, and connects them to the current Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) in Detroit. However, while she locates the DBCFSN within the legacy of black food cultivation efforts, she asserts a temporal and geographic separation (p. 118f.). This work aims to show the continuities of black subsistence farming that migrated north during the Great Migration(s). Cf. Monica M. White, *Freedom Farmers. Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

The Challenges of Mobilization

The entry of the United States into both World Wars signaled tremendous changes in some of the most personal choices and areas of conduct in Americans' everyday lives, namely the production and consumption of food. Women took center stage in these transformations as they were urged to abandon their roles as consumers and instead contribute to wartime production. This opened up new spaces for women that not only allowed for female participation but downright depended on it. During both world wars, women were thus able to enter economic, political, and social spheres they had previously been excluded from. As this chapter shows, the history of war gardens demonstrates these important advances. Simultaneously, it reveals gendered continuities that contextualize how and why women lost many of these advances after each war. War gardening propaganda built on the gendered notion of the private sphere and women's central role as economic managers of the home (which was obviously paired with ideological depictions of female nurturing and other emotional stereotypes). Interestingly, while scholarship has focused on women's war gardening efforts, a closer look at Detroit's urban agriculture history reveals predominantly male actors. Perhaps this is due to the source material (newspaper articles, pictures, program reports, created in male-dominated professions), perhaps Detroit strays from national currents due to local historical factors (Detroit's early urban agriculture focused on unemployed men), or perhaps female agency could be enacted within the relative safety of domesticity (buying war bread, home gardening etc.), while the act and location of coordinated food cultivation (often undertaken on parcels of empty land and demanding intense labor) strayed too far beyond gendered physical and geographic boundaries.

In spite of these parallels, the home fronts of World War I and II also differed substantially. While the latter was dominated by centralized planning efforts undertaken by large, temporary government entities that directed the wartime economic transformation, following ideals of efficiency and productivity, the World War I home front was significantly less organized. Historian Christopher Capozzola has shown how state efforts to mobilize the masses moved from stressing sacrifice, duty, and responsibility (as opposed to individual rights and liberties) to more coercive measures that ultimately expanded the role of the state. He argues that the modern conception of American citizenship finds its origin in what he terms "coercive voluntarism," in which Americans govern themselves and each other to perform acts

of patriotism and demonstrate their sense of duty.[6] Indeed, World War I posed significant challenges to a country whose military might was smaller than that of Belgium and whose economy was organized around diverse regions far away (geographically and ideologically) from central power elites. As historian David M. Kennedy notes, "[t]he absence of the knowledge essential to a well-coordinated war effort had been painfully obvious from the outset of mobilization, and the drive to overcome ignorance about large-scale aggregative phenomena in American life was one of the principal creations of the war era."[7] Transforming the American economy to meet wartime demands proved challenging, and gazing across the Atlantic at the German enemy nation, which was perceived as more rationalized and efficient, heightened anxieties among American technocrats.[8] The predominant organization of American production processes along geographic lines direly needed to change. In order to achieve vertical integration along functional lines, new government agencies like the Food Administration, the Fuel Administration, the Railroad Administration, and the War Industries Board emerged. However, the disregard that these federal entities showed toward state organizations revealed fundamental paradoxes and shortcomings in the drive toward more efficient and rationalized processes.[9]

The Food Administration was the first of these entities to take shape, signaling the importance of increased food production. America's Allied nations, especially Great Britain, relied on American supplies of food and war materials. By 1917, most able-bodied European men had been absorbed by the various armies that were engaged in combat, resulting in severe labor shortages across domestic agricultural sectors. On the continent, agricultural production had been severely affected by the outbreak of the war as battle replaced cultivation and ravaged vast areas that had previously fed people. Beginning in 1914, increasing numbers of farmers left their fields for the Front, while poor weather conditions put an additional strain on yields on both sides of the Atlantic. War gardening, rationing, and changes in eating habits became increasingly important on all sides of the Front. However, America's allies also grew to depend increasingly on U.S. food supplies. German submarine warfare threatened the safe passage of such goods and ensured mounting pressure on American farmers to produce higher yields for export. Severe weather patterns in 1916 and 1917 affected the productivity of the Midwestern

[6] Cf. Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You. World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[7] David M. Kennedy, *Over Here. The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 113.
[8] Ibid., 113f.
[9] Ibid., 116f.

plains. Farmers, who anticipated rising prices for grain on the exchanges after the poor 1916 season, held back harvests. Such speculation threatened chaos.[10] President Wilson intervened in the precarious situation and installed Herbert Hoover, whose reputation as a quintessential self-made man was only surpassed by the prestige he gathered as head of the Commission for the Relief of Belgium, to head the Food Administration in May 1917.[11] While Europe imposed rationing and price fixing as coercive ways of dealing with food shortages, Hoover stepped onto the scene pledging that American food policy would be "based on an entirely different conception from that of Europe. […] Our conception of the problem in the United States is that we should assemble the voluntary effort of the people. […] We propose to mobilize the spirit of self-denial and self-sacrifice in this country."[12] In light of the severity of demands, and American farmers' disdain for the war and preference for maximizing profits, Hoover's ambitions were more than avid. However, by keeping prices high instead of fixing them, he successfully created an incentive for higher agricultural production. In this way, Hoover metaphorically turned lemons into lemonade. Additionally, the wartime propaganda machine flooded skeptical American farmers, as well as motivating consumers, with patriotic messages that repeated Hoover's language of self-denial and self-restraint.

Such abnegating sentiments not only aimed at changing American consumption patterns, but also entailed civilian contributions to food production. Here, women found opportunities to enter traditionally male-dominated occupations. Inspired by the success of the British Women's Land Army (WLA), Ida H. Ogilvie and Delia W. Marble converted their co-owned 680-acre farm in New York into an agricultural experiment and training station for women. Situated in the educated, white middle-class and with close ties to Barnard College, the two embarked on a journey to spread the idea of female agricultural labor to compensate for those who left American farms for the front lines in 1917. As women's groups spread the idea to "Get Behind the Girl He Left Behind" on college campuses across the nation, the newly founded Women's Land Army of America (WLAA) teamed up with the Women's National Farm and Garden Association (WNFGA) to promote and organize female replacement labor.[13] Suffragists and Suffragettes took passionately to the cause. For militant feminists, the garden represented a "zone of contestation" in which ideas about domesticity and femininity could be

[10] Cf. Hayden-Smith, 38f.; Kennedy, 117f.; Lawson, 118f;
[11] The Food Administration existed by presidential decree only from May until August 1917, when Congress made it official by passing the Lever Food and Fuel Act. Cf. Kennedy, 123.
[12] Quoted in Kennedy, 118.
[13] For a detailed history of the British and American Women's Land Armies, cf. Cecilia Gowdy-Wygant, *Cultivating Victory. The Women's Land Army and the Victory Garden Movement.* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 35-62.

attacked and corrected. While the garden became "an increasingly significant aspect of middle-class identity throughout the nineteenth century" this had since also been contested in efforts that "connected [gardening] with opportunities in education and new social movements."[14] The WLA now represented an unprecedented opportunity to advance women's rights and equality. As Cecilia Gowdy-Wygant argues, these new opportunities enabled women to make political gains beyond the temporal limits of the war. Wygant points out that "agricultural labor shortages served female political and social activists such as Harriot Stanton Blatch, Countess Frances Evelyn 'Daisy' Maynard Warwick, and Lady Gertrude Denman […] in Great Britain and the United States to improve the position of women in labor and to increase the momentum of the global female suffrage movements."[15] Indeed, the fact that women achieved increased political recognition and participation in 1919, when the passage of the 19th Amendment granted them the right to vote, points to lasting transformations of women's political place within American society. However, as I explore later, the discourse around the expansion of women's roles was tightly controlled, engaged with traditional notions of femininity, and incorporated highly limited notions of female agency.

While historical sources highlight white women's (and children's) roles on and contributions to the urban agrarian home front, race is much harder to investigate. Due to historical exclusion from mainstream society, blacks were simply not targeted in the propaganda efforts of institutions like the *National War Garden Commission*, nor were they represented in media reports on war gardening. I will, thus, provide the necessary sociopolitical and cultural historical backdrop upon which we can paint informed imaginations of African American contributions to the war garden eras. I do this because both World Wars spurred massive inner-American migratory movements that brought millions of blacks out of the South and into US cities, a phenomenon that has shaped both places. For Detroit, which today is a majority-black city, these periods remain formative, and have shaped the history of local urban agrarian history.

[14] George McKay, *Radical Gardening. Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2011), 142.
[15] Gowdy-Wygant, 15f.

Racial Transformation

Between 1916 and 1940 (the *First Great Migration*) some 1.6 million blacks moved to northeastern, midwestern, and western states, and between 1940 and 1970, some five million followed suit during the *Second Great Migration*. As I outline below in more detail, subsistence gardening had been a common practice in black, southern everyday lives and it has been documented that wherever and whenever black migrants had the chance, they continued growing crops.[16] It is, thus, not only safe to assume at least some black participation in and contribution to war gardening; it is also paramount to acknowledge and value the roles of black Americans in the making of urban America as it emerged after World War II.

Broadly speaking, African Americans experienced similar progress to women during both wartime eras. Gaining access to jobs that had hitherto been reserved for whites created precious opportunities for black social mobility. As white women were gaining some access to the public sphere during these exceptional times, some blacks managed to enter the ranks of the American middle class. However, deeply inscribed racist stigmata would prevail, regularly breaking through the surface in violent eruptions, typically referred to as *race riots*. During the first half of the 20th century, Detroit played a central role within the American economy and saw rapid growth in population. Immigrants as well as inner-American migrants took to the city in droves, hoping to find a new home that would support their economic needs and personal freedoms. Between 1910 and 1920, Detroit's population doubled from 465,000 to just under a million, with Blacks making up 5,000 and 40,000 respectively. The increase in industrial production following the outbreak of World War I in Europe soon caused a labor shortage in Detroit and other industrial areas. With this, the trickle of Blacks (and poor whites) out of the South accelerated and became an unprecedented internal migration movement that historians have since termed the *First Great Migration*.[17]

In addition to such economic pull factors, which also inspired considerable migration of economically underprivileged whites out of the south, blacks experienced numerous push

[16] For more information on the role of Black women (and their gardens) in transforming Detroit in the interwar years, cf. Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Alice Walker honors her mother's artistic ability to grow crops and provides invaluable insight into the cultural and socioeconomic meanings of gardens in black and poor communities in: Alice Walker, *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens* (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1984), 231-243.

[17] The usual timeline for the first Great Migration is between 1916 and 1940. It should be noted, though, that black northward migration did exist prior to 1916. Michigan started seeing the first significant black migration in the 1840s. By 1850, Detroit was home to a black population of some 500. By 1870, many blacks had settled in the area around Hastings Street that would later become known as Black Bottom. As a prominent exit-point of the Underground Railroad, Detroit also attained vital importance within African American history.

factors that were deeply embedded in the region's socioeconomic, cultural, and political history. While slavery had ended in the South in 1865, the period that followed, the so-called *Reconstruction*, had seen the passage of legislation that "reconstructed" social and legal norms, which effectively made sure that very little changed in the sociopolitical hierarchy of the agricultural south. Formerly enslaved laborers became sharecroppers and tenant farmers, who worked in a system of dependence that barely ensured their survival. So-called "literacy tests" kept most black Southerners away from the ballot box, and blacks had to follow a strict social code, performing subordination by calling whites "Ma'am" and "Sir" while being addressed as "Boy" or other demeaning names in return. Minor infractions against these social codes could carry significant repercussions. Lynchings and the Ku Klux Klan further added to the terror southern blacks endured, which served to uphold racialized socioeconomic structures. With the onset of the First World War, industrial recruiters began to tour the South. Keenly aware of the hostile environment blacks faced, they spread the word to this receptive audience that industrial jobs would provide up to three times the salary blacks could expect to make in the South.

Of the 1.6 million blacks who moved out of the South during the *First Great Migration*, over one million had migrated north by1919. Even though discrimination in the job and housing markets was much more commonplace than many had expected, small pockets of urban middle-class blacks were able to rise up in these new home cities. However, blacks were not safe from physical threats. In Detroit, so-called *race riots* would follow each attempt by blacks to move into non-black neighborhoods. After the First World War, racism only intensified. In the 1920s, burning crosses and men in white hoods became common-place and often publicly lauded phenomena in Detroit's streets. In 1924, the Ku Klux Klan even successfully ran its own write-in candidate for mayor. Only the annulment of 17,000 votes on technicalities prevented him from taking office. The following year, "hundreds of whites, led by the KKK, attacked the home of Ossian Sweet, a black doctor who had recently moved into an all-white neighborhood. The Sweet family was armed and fired upon the mob in self-defense, killing one white. Dr. Sweet, rather than the rioters, was put on trial."[18] Beyond shattering dreams of a more peaceful and economically stable life, the KKK's popularity in Detroit revealed the hopes of black migrants to be based on myths. Furthermore, the above examples demonstrate not only the extent and dangers of racism within Detroit's society to its black members, but also reveal the institutional internalization of these sentiments, which upheld white supremacy

[18] Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying. A Study in Urban Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1998 (updated edition), 153.

and punished blacks for the violence they had encountered instead of the perpetrators of such acts.

Crop cultivation formed a vital part of southern black life. Therefore, we can safely assume that African Americans participated in the war garden efforts during both world wars. Prior experience in crop cultivation and food preservation likely also provided higher yields. However, due to the marginalized position blacks were subjected to, their efforts were neither acknowledged in official documents nor in the countless media reports that remain and help tell this history. The absence of black voices, like those of many other marginalized communities in this text, provides insight into the position that whiteness held within the patriotic wartime discourse. For the reader it might come as no surprise that the baseline politics of whiteness becomes even more exclusive in times of war, creating a uniform racial image of society, but in a historical study such as this one that inherently preserves stories of the past, the African American experience may remain undocumented but it must not remain unacknowledged.

Gender and Food

After the United States officially entered into World War I on April 6, 1917, 65,000 Detroiters would ultimately join the American military. With an overall population approaching 700,000 this meant that almost 10 percent of Detroiters would see to their military duties and abandon their regular workplaces. As economic production switched to producing wartime goods for the military, it was of vital importance that their positions be filled. Furthermore, war contracts intensified the labor shortage by creating additional jobs. Detroit, as an industrial hub, saw the effects of these transformations more than other American cities and the speed and extent of the changes left lasting consequences. The rapidly increasing population was mirrored in the city's geographic expansion; however, congestion was nonetheless a dominant characteristic of the urban environment, especially in economically underprivileged areas.

In early 1918, Detroit's numerous factories were converted to wartime shops, producing aircraft engines, tanks, tractors, military vehicles, and guns. The production of such goods for the war effort was only one side of the economic transformation. Americans were also urged to "contribute" by altering and limiting their consumer choices, thus easing the mounting pressures of supplying war-torn allies as well as the local market. Wartime rationing became a

patriotic duty as propaganda efforts urged the population to abandon their usual consumption patterns and limit themselves in service to their country. "Food Will Win the War," declared Herbert Hoover, head of the Food Administration. Indeed, food (and energy) consumption played a vital role in this, as both were in high demand on the front. State-led efforts to implement rationing systems, as well as to urge people to voluntarily limit their consumption, were targeted at women, who now found their restrictive roles within the private sphere of the home suddenly elevated to political significance. When Detroit held its first *Meatless Day* on October 3, 1917, homemakers didn't just prepare meatless dishes to be consumed. Their experience of cooking and serving meals became a publicly recognized political choice. The mundane task became an act of participation in and contribution to the public political and economic sphere, from which they were still largely excluded, having yet to win the right to vote. Furthermore, while conservation efforts elevated the perception and recognition of female agency within the private sphere (paradoxically by urging restraint, thus subjecting female agency to regulation and control while elevating it to a position where women themselves regulated and controlled consumption), the nature of female consumer choices and their mindfulness as to larger implications were mirrored in energy preservation efforts in industrial production. On December 22, 1917, manufacturing of all goods except ammunition was halted as an energy-conservation effort and the following month saw the beginning of ten consecutive heat-less Mondays. All Detroit businesses except hotels, restaurants, and pharmacies closed for an entire week to contribute to these efforts. In January 1918, *War Bread* was distributed in Detroit.[19] Due to grain shortages, potato starch replaced significant amounts of wheat in these breads. While the resulting flavor and texture enjoyed little popularity, it was for women to advocate for these products despite their shortcomings. With the energy-conservation efforts in businesses and industry, women saw a reflection of their own sacrificial contributions within the larger economy. Overall, wartime economic transformation created a lack of available consumer goods. This material vacuum was filled by propaganda, aiming to create a spirit of equality through shared sacrifice. Patriotism and nationalism rested upon this foundation of restraint and servitude, and for the limited time of this particular moment in history, gendered states of exception could break through the traditionally limited spheres of women's societal roles.

[19] Cf. David Lee Poremba, *Detroit. A Motor City History* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 110.

"A Spirit of Perseverance": Cultivating the Home Front

In comparison to the earlier crop cultivation efforts, World War I's war gardens revealed strong differences in their organizational form. Whereas earlier programs were locally organized and implemented by diverse private, civic, and public groups, government agencies now showed increasing presence and involvement. As Laura J. Lawson shows in *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America*, this produced "an organizational approach that blended top-down guidance and bottom-up action."[20] Federal involvement in crop-oriented gardening had already begun in 1914 with the establishment of the U.S. Bureau of Education's Office of School and Home Gardening. When the official war gardening efforts started in the U.S. in early 1917, this program became the U.S. School Garden Army, an organization aiming to spread the patriotic spirit of war gardening amongst the youth. Additionally, the *Food Administration* and the *Council of National Defense* adopted gardening in their domestic conservation programs. According to Lawson, "Voluntary organizations, including the National War Garden Commission and several women's federations, provided the pivotal connection between federal agencies' technical support and local implementation by volunteers."[21] While this interweaving of federal agencies with local civic associations, garden clubs, women's clubs, and other groups produced astonishing results at a fast pace, it also meant that when the government lost interest in gardening after the war, the phenomenon vanished almost as quickly as it had appeared.[22] However, I would argue that government actors also learned that civilian crop cultivation could be propagated and inspired relatively easily and cheaply, and that local groups could function conveniently as steps on the top-down ladder to achieve goals set by the federal government. This would help add an institutional layer to the historical explanations for why and how subsequent gardening efforts — e.g. during the Great Depression and World War II — increasingly relied on hierarchical organizational forms. National campaigns such as these improved efficiency in how information and resources were distributed, relying on "[n]ational agencies and institutions [that] provided expertise and technical information, while citywide activities were frequently organized by local chapters of national clubs, such as women's clubs and garden clubs,"[23] that effectively dispersed and implemented the means of such campaigns.

[20] Lawson, 114.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 115.

The top-down approach to domestic crop cultivation proved to be fruitful for wartime food security. Household food production and preservation would prove to be efficient and reliable practices to help in the effort. Encouraged by government agencies and volunteer organizations that came together as a private-public partnership in the form of the *National War Garden Commission* (NWGC, 1917-1919), American households reportedly cultivated between 3 and 3.5 million gardens in 1917, which took up an estimated 1.15 million acres,[24] producing an estimated $350 million in food and preserving over 500 million quarts of fruit and vegetables for later consumption. In 1918, the program was expanded, resulting in just under 5.3 million garden spaces that produced around $525 million in food value, and 1.45 billion quarts in canned fruit and vegetables.[25] In order to ensure successful food cultivation and preservation efforts and keep participants from growing overwhelmed or disheartened by fruitless efforts, the NWGC published resource materials, which could be ordered by anyone free of charge.

The notions of domestic food production and preservation, and changes in consumption habits were deeply embedded in larger national efforts to transform the food economy. The facilitator of the NWGC, Charles Lanthrop Pack, was dismissive of the federal government's involvement in the war garden efforts and later actively obscured the links between the two actors in his publications. However, historical sources show an institutional interlinking that speaks to the opposite. Pack, one of the five wealthiest Americans of his time, highlighted the notion of volunteerism that held a prominent place in America's understanding of democracy, as well as the superiority of philanthropic work over state-driven programs. Simultaneously, the NWGC was deeply involved in the socioeconomic transformation of America's food system, aiding its implementation on the ground, as well as reflecting broader institutional notions of systematically managing change. This tension between liberal (if not libertarian) anti-government rhetoric and the elevation of individual philanthropists who engaged the same socioeconomic and educated elites that government entities would engage to carry out their plans, has characterized the practical shortcomings and philosophical contradictions of many progressive reformers. Pack's critics picked up on the tension and accused him of self-aggrandizement.[26]

Indeed, if we follow national approaches to food-system change, wartime gardening fundamentally reflected an institutional, managerial logic on several levels, ranging from the

[24] Acreage cited in "Victory Gardens to Dot Michigan," *The Ironwood Times*, January 28, 1942.
[25] Cf. Hayden-Smith, 36, Lawson, 118.
[26] Cf. Hayden-Smith, 46-49.

idea to produce food locally to conserve energy that would otherwise be spent on transportation, to what I would characterize as embodied notions of patriotic production-consumption that aimed to mobilize civilians in the war at home — the home front. Herbert Hoover, whom President Woodrow Wilson had appointed to lead the Food Administration when the U.S. entered World War I and who subsequently coined himself the country's *food czar*, worked tirelessly to convince Americans that only their *voluntary* participation would help the country emerge victorious. "Food Will Win the War" became the Food Administration's slogan — a sentiment that deeply entangled personal consumption, foreign policy, and broader legislative efforts to regulate and restrict food production and supply. While of heightened importance during the war years, such efforts went beyond the temporal boundaries of World War I, as the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 and later New Deal efforts to regulate the food system demonstrated. We can, thus, understand the institutional logic and practical implementation of wartime food regulation as enmeshed in larger nation-building efforts preceding the temporary state of exception of war, as well as identify how this period shaped subsequent undercurrent logics of regulating, organizing, and rationalizing that drove the post-World War I ordering and re-ordering of the American food system.[27]

Columbia Sowing the Seeds of Victory

While World War I gardens have been overshadowed by the Victory Garden campaign of World War II and have faded into relative obscurity, they were of vital importance at the time. As Rose Hayden-Smith demonstrates in her detailed study of the phenomenon, "[w]artime gardening not only was designed to serve practical purposes (increased food production), but also was a vital contribution to — and even an obligation of — American citizenship."[28] Gardening became a way of demonstrating and practicing patriotic service to the nation. Its significance was understood widely, which helps explain how Americans "were even willing to challenge deeply-held beliefs to engage in wartime gardening; very public debates on the appropriateness of gardening on Sunday and the appropriateness of women laboring in agriculture occurred in American parlors, communities, and newspapers."[29] While women laborers — mostly urban, white, and either college-educated or "factory girls," who

[27] Ibid., 58-60.
[28] Ibid., 35.
[29] Ibid.

flocked to fill agricultural labor shortages through the Woman's Land Army of America — challenged beliefs and expanded the perceptions and socioeconomic opportunities of their admittedly narrow and often relatively privileged group, enlisting children in the war garden effort enjoyed wide consent and support. The Bureau of Education developed a national curriculum for wartime gardening, attracting some two million enrollees.[30] This showed that the agricultural education of children was more socially acceptable than attempting to change one's position in society through agricultural work. The positive associations connected to agricultural labor, dating back to Jeffersonian democratic ideals, were valued in connection to rearing the next generation and teaching them democratic ideals rather than questioning the state of democracy as it pertained to disenfranchised groups in such a democratic society. Agrarianism, during the World War I era, certainly bore little revolutionary potential, and rather aimed to serve the stabilization and social stratification upon which the political system rested.

The complex social (re-)negotiation of who could, or rather should, participate in the patriotic practice of war gardening can be better understood by looking at the discursive construction, namely the propaganda efforts, surrounding household food production. Mrs. Mary Belle Sherman, who was the only female member of the NWGC's board, used her influential institutional position to push for female participation in wartime, domestic food production. "American women are confronted by a condition and a responsibility and opportunity without parallel in the history of the world," she argued. Calling attention to the "slacker land" in American backyards, gardening advocates like Mrs. Sherman extended the public sphere into the private sphere of homes, simultaneously co-opting the private sphere, enabling the federal government's reach into it, and creating female presence and participation within the public sphere.[31] I would argue that this was by no means an emancipatory moment within women's history. While the role women could play in the war effort was extended, the rules and limitations of such extended roles were clearly defined by propaganda efforts — more freedom was only possible under more narrowly defined limits on freedom. The cultural meanings of domestic food cultivation, obviously, revolved around the notions of patriotic duty, but also "nearly always [employed] a reform angle, whether it be community beautification, the value of hard work, or improved nutrition."[32] Hence, women's contributions did not come from their own, emancipatory right but were tightly regulated, and centered

[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 53.
[32] Ibid., 63.

around the notion of serving a higher purpose. Typically, NWGC would use media outlets to spread its garden advocacy by connecting gardens to the war effort. These spaces now became "munitions plants," stages for a Lady Liberty (Columbia) dressed in an American flag to sow her seeds, "Garden Trenches" in which the enemy was fought, with tools that became weapons, as the slogan "The Hoe is the Machine Gun of the Garden" proclaimed. "Food Must Follow the Flag," another popular slogan, clearly entailed the subordinate position of women food producers within the nationalistic hierarchy. "Following the flag" connected their position to notions of servitude, which had for so long defined the social position of women.[33]

"Go Forth in the Morning…": World War I Garden Ecologies (1917-1919)

Above we saw how transnational movements of ideas shaped American wartime food production approaches. The close relationship between the United States and Great Britain played a central role in the American emergence of war gardening and the broadening of farm labor practices. Especially the category of women experienced gains as hitherto closed spaces opened up. The history of war gardening in Detroit reflects this, but it also shows a different transnational perspective that shaped local, domestic food production efforts. As a city with a historically large German population, Detroit's urban war gardens became contested sites, revealing that loyalty to American interests in the war was not guaranteed in the local urban context. As I argue on the following pages, Detroit war gardens of World War I reveal the instability of war gardening efforts as a nationalistic propaganda effort. Neither ideological, patriotic unity, nor gendered, progressive notions could easily grow roots in Detroit. Furthermore, I show that these challenges find a common dimension in which negotiation, contestation, back and forth, pro and con unfold: the knowledge (or lack thereof) of crop cultivation in urban spaces.

[33] Ibid., 63f.

Pro-Kaiser Weeds, Vandalism, and Contested Spaces

In early summer 1917, Joseph Brilowski and Howard Earle decided to join together to cultivate a war garden. The two men had been neighbors, and while an unsuccessful attempt by Earle to sell Brilowski war savings stamps had caused some tension, they soon bonded again, sharing concern about the country's food security. Bundling the resources each had, they came to the agreement that Earle would buy the seeds and Brilowski would plant and grow the crops. As the days grew longer, providing more light for plants to grow, Brilowski worked the garden, watched green leaves unfold and expand, dreaming of a plentiful harvest that would enable both families to save money on food. While the plants kept growing, Brilowski's hopes slowly eroded. Searching for thick buds of cabbages forming remained as unsuccessful as finding tomatoes taking shape where delicate blossoms had withered. In late summer, when the time came to dig up potatoes, Brilowski's growing concern turned into bitter reality. Not a single potato was to be found. The seeds his neighbor had given him produced nothing but weeds; all that hard work had been for nothing. Angered by the ordeal, he decided to sue Earle for services rendered, demanding a payment of $60.[34] Earle, however, suspected foul play and turned defense into powerful offense. In court, he and his wife reiterated the war-savings-stamps episode, painting an unpatriotic picture of Brilowski, and testified that the weeds as well as their neighbor were, in fact, pro-German: "[T]hey believed he allowed the war garden to grow weeds on purpose so that he might help the Kaiser."[35] Brilowski's defense that "he had done the work all right, but the seeds were not what they should be"[36] proved weak and ultimately ineffective. Judge De Gaw ruled in favor of the defendant, Earle, who suffered a stroke.

This small episode reveals how World War I war gardens in Detroit existed in a politically and ideologically charged climate, which in this case clouded issues of class. Both sufficient knowledge of plant cultivation and economic privilege peek through, and a determination of fault or ill intention is impossible in hindsight. However, the episode is also set in a time and place where vegetable theft, as well as "acts of vandalism," occurred frequently in war gardens, revealing again the contested nature of these war garden spaces. In late summer of 1917, the end of the local inaugural season, reports of crop theft accumulated

[34] In purchasing power this amounts to $1,000 in 2018 (newest available data set). However, in relative labor earnings of an unskilled worker it would amount to $3,580 in 2018 value. Cf. "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount - 1790 to Present", Measuring Worth.com. https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/ (accessed 14 Jan, 2020).
[35] "Says Pro-Kaiser Weeds Blighted His War Garden," *Detroit Free Press*, October 30, 1918, 5.
[36] Ibid.

and planters began publicly criticizing Detroit Mayor Marx and the police department for failing to protect war gardens, "breaking promises in an unpatriotic manner."[37] William T. Locker, a local grower, lamented "Mayor Marx urges us to plant vegetables as a war conservation duty […]. Now he will not protect the fruits of our labor from thieves. I was told in his office there is a shortage of policemen and I replied that plenty of policemen could be found if some big corporation was threatened with any trouble."[38] Locker, who spoke for himself and fellow war gardeners, reported that almost all 50 garden plots that were co-organized as "Joy Farm" in his neighborhood, had seen theft. Another war gardener reported from his plot that "[n]ot only did [thieves] take away what was of edible size, but pulled up what would have been of any good. I do not think that all of the gardens were destroyed in this way, but I know of several that were. In fact, in the northwestern end of the city every other garden was destroyed in this manner."[39] The frequency of such anecdotal accounts increased in Detroit papers, putting pressure on local political leadership. Threats of vigilante action and heated-up rhetoric that framed crop theft as perpetuated by "aides to the Kaiser"[40] reflected anxieties about an *enemy within* that was eroding American war efforts. Voices that approached these incidents with caution, reflecting on poverty and food insecurity within Detroit, remained absent. For example, it is highly likely that inexperienced gardeners would pull up vegetables prematurely, especially if they were unfamiliar with the spaces and timespans over which such crops had been cultivated. The dominant interweaving of "crop theft" and "vandalism" blur such considerations but also speak to the disparate knowledge economies of war gardening. For one, wartime framing dominates these accounts and shapes the lack of certainty about actors ("thieves," "night prowlers") or their motivations ("personal aides to the Kaiser and his gang"), highlighting a culture of fear that asked for appropriate responses — policing and control. For another, these accounts demonstrate the intensity of the personal connections that war gardeners felt to their crops. To these gardeners, they not only signified the literal fruits of their labor and economic benefits, they also symbolized the ideological connection between grower and their warring homeland. War gardens may just as well have become targets of sabotage, but more important is the pervasiveness itself of vandalism in the accounts. The undercurrent of wartime xenophobia displaced curiosity and inquiry into the unknown. Within this acrimonious atmosphere, Detroit's political leadership, unsurprisingly, reacted by creating

[37] "Mayor Angers Truck Raisers," *Detroit Free Press*, 20 August, 1917, 1.
[38] Ibid.
[39] "About War Gardens," *Detroit Free Press*, 8 December, 1917, 4.
[40] Ibid.

harsh sanctions (a city ordinance introduced in September 1918 fixed "a penalty of $100[41] and six months imprisonment for those convicted of maliciously damaging gardens in Detroit"[42]). This institutional framework further rooted wartime crop cultivation in a contested ecology of knowledge and control.

Human actors were by far the only threats to Detroit's war gardens. In fact, across Michigan, free-ranging animals in urban and suburban areas became a contested topic as reports of livestock and dogs wreaking havoc in war gardens became increasingly frequent. The state's Food Administrator, George A. Prescott, addressed Michigan mayors in early 1918 to raise awareness:[43]

> "We are receiving complaints from all parts of the state that was gardens suffered greatly last year because of careless habits of people who permit their chickens to run at large. The same conditions prevail this year and unless immediate steps are taken, many of our citizens will allow their ground to be idle rather than have their time and money sacrificed to their neighbors' thoughtlessness or indifferences. Our situation is sufficiently serious to demand that every available plot of ground be cultivated and that loss of production and waste of food be absolutely eliminated. Will you kindly instruct your chief of police or town marshal to see that no chickens or live stock are permitted to run at large and deal with these who willfully ignore your orders to the full extent of the state laws and your local ordnances [sic]?"

In 1917 Michigan war gardens (and those of 23 other states) reportedly produced a food surplus that posed challenges to both vegetable farmers, who struggled to sell their produce at regular prices, and Food Administrators tasked with rallying the public (which obviously included such farmers) around a rather unpopular war.[44] The urgency of Prescott's statement ("Our situation is sufficiently serious to demand…"), thus, belies the urgency of the situation to some degree. It seems that urgency, need, and the implicit danger themselves served as wartime shibboleths, around which ideological companionship was organized by institutions like the War Food Administration. Within this constellation, war garden spaces became entities regulated to produce ideological labor and that functioned around notions of controlled, efficient, and productive (garden) environments.

The role of knowledge is central to the successful construction of such war gardening conditions. The National War Garden Commission (NWGC) worked to disseminate

[41] In purchasing power, this amounts to $1,670 in 2018 (newest available data set). However, in relative labor earnings of an unskilled worker it would amount to $5,960 in 2018 value. Cf. "Seven Ways…".
[42] "Alderman Walsh Introduces Ordinance to Punish," *Detroit Free Press*, 25 September, 1918, 18.
[43] "Protection asked for War Gardens," *Detroit Free Press*, 21 April, 1918, P. 13; "Dogs and Food Supplies," *Lansing State Journal*, 21 June, 1917, 4.
[44] Cf. "24 States Have Surplus," *Detroit Free Press*, 2 August, 1917, 7.

information about plant cultivation and food preservation, publishing "War Vegetable Gardening" and "Home Canning and Drying," which could be ordered by anyone free of charge. In addition to providing basic information about crop cultivation — the importance and intricacies of planning and crop selection, planting and cultivation practices including weeding and pest control, determination of ripeness and other issues of harvesting — the focus on food preservation aimed to expand the benefits that war gardening presented to the national food economy. Furthermore, practical knowledge dissemination was aided by the newly-created Cooperative Extension Service (CES, 1914) of the USDA.[45] Through these regional agencies that sent extension agents into local communities and provided hands-on, educational demonstration and training sessions in crop cultivation and food preservation, the CES was able to react quickly and extensively to the wartime transformations of the American food economy.[46] Knowledge about food preservation effectively made war gardening a year-round experience based on calculating and estimating food consumption. Within this construction, the bodies of cultivators and food preservers are positioned as producing consumers serving an ideological cause, while cultivation spaces move in and out of importance and contestation, visually representing the practice as barren land during winter, then changing their appearance over the season.

In Detroit, as in other places across the nation, local media provided considerable aid to war gardening's educational efforts. The *Detroit Free Press*, one of the city's three large daily papers,[47] catered to its liberal-progressive leaning audience by featuring numerous articles and advice columns on war gardening and, to a lesser extent, food preservation. During the 1918 growing season, the *Free Press* contributor S.S. Cline took the readers on weekly "Adventures in a War Garden." In the column, Cline informed readers about the financial, ecological, physical, and informal aspects of cultivating a garden, providing anecdotes about the watchful eyes of neighbors and his spouse's failure to grow any food, as well as the season's unusual dryness and dogs wreaking havoc on his backyard harvest.[48] Eventually, Cline's banter with his neighbor culminates in the two pairing up to take on an empty lot.[49] The pair end up spending several hours each day working on their "farm," going through crop patterns that

[45] Cf. Chapter II for a more detailed analysis of the CES' role in American agricultural history.
[46] Cf. Hayden-Smith, 40, 70.
[47] The *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* are still in operation. The third daily, *Detroit Times*, ceased publication in 1960.
[48] Cf. S.S. Cline: "Adventures in a War Garden," *Detroit Free Press*, 12. May, 1918, 79; cf. S.S. Cline: "Adventures in a War Garden," *Detroit Free Press*, 5. May, 1918, 80; cf. S.S. Cline: "Adventures in a War Garden," *Detroit Free Press*, 28. April, 1918, 80; cf. S.S. Cline: "Adventures in a War Garden," *Detroit Free Press*, 14. April, 1918, 76.
[49] Cf. S.S. Cline: "Adventures in a War Garden," *Detroit Free Press*, 19. May, 1918, 76.

would ensure a plentiful supply of fresh vegetables and legumes throughout the season.[50] Reading the weekly reports, it becomes apparent that the author also used his platform to engage with other war gardeners, sharing their experiences and offering advice.[51] The *Free Press*, as well as the other daily papers in Detroit and large Michigan cities, also featured a host of informational and propagandistic articles on war gardens. "Keep the Home Soil Turning," a project by the NWGC aiming to inform citizens of economic benefits that could sprout in their backyards, was delivered to homes across the state.[52] Unexpected lyrical masterpieces can be found in these sources. Advocating to "Can the Kaiser" — a popular slogan of the NWGC — or assisting war gardeners in the eradication of pests, the media helped launch the ideology, knowledge, and practiced experience of war gardening into the homes of Americans. My personal delight about the following text (and the author's name) must not cloud the critical gaze that perceives war gardening as an ideological, organizational practice.[53]

> Exterminating potato bugs is a simple matter. Go forth in the morning with a large stone, a tin pail and a hammer. Catch the potato bug, place him on the stone and tap him on the head smartly with the hammer and place the remains in the tin pail. Keep at it until all the bugs are wiped out. […] Steady wins.
> - Amos J. Proudfoot

"Soldiers of the Soil": The American Victory Garden Campaign (1942-1945)

The World War II home front signified institutional learning processes in regard to economic planning that built on the experiences gained during World War I as well as the Great Depression. Like World War I, the outbreak of the Second World War created increasing economic demands that necessitated a transformation of the economy. The earlier wartime experiences, as well as the New Deal era, had shown that top-down planning could provide estimates of increasing demands and implement programs to meet them, providing effective and efficient economic responses. The role of technocratic expertise that came to define the heights of Keynesianism during this period would steer wartime economic production, including the food economy. While today the *Victory Gardens* of World War II still feature prominently in public memory, their place in the war effort was not self-evident. Initially —

[50] Cf. S.S. Cline: "Adventures in a War Garden," *Detroit Free Press*, 26. May, 1918, 74.
[51] Cf. S.S. Cline: "Adventures in a War Garden," *Detroit Free Press*, 2. June, 1918, 74.
[52] Glenn Kyes, "Keep the Home Soil Turning," *Lansing State Journal*, 11. May, 1918, 3.
[53] Amos J. Proudfoot quoted in: *The Times Herald*, Sept. 13, 1917, 4.

and this underlines the dominant role that centralized, technocratic planning had assumed within America's economy since World War I — "federal experts […] hesitated to include urban gardening in their national policy for wartime food export and domestic security […c]iting the inefficiencies of small-scale urban gardens and the likelihood of fertilizers and seed being wasted by inexperienced gardeners."[54] Perhaps for similar reasons, school gardening played a lesser role than it had during World War I. Reflecting modern "organizational society" that emerged from the New Deal era and was characterized by large institutions ("big government," "big business," "big labor," and "big farming"),[55] these hesitations and changes grant us insight into the discourse around resources, which served as an institutional framework for wartime gardening.

Improved agricultural practices, technological innovation, and centralized planning had driven increasing efficiency in food production. The implementation of the Lend-Lease program in March 1941 that included food exports to (and food redistribution between) Allied countries was possible because of these changes in the production sector. American-produced wheat, flour, sugar, canned and cured meats, dairy products, legumes, as well as canned vegetables and vegetable oil, made their way to the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. Approximately 25 percent of U.S. foodstuffs went into supplying United States and Allied military forces. The considerably increased demand could not have been met by the agricultural sector without the technological and organizational developments of the previous years. In 1942, for example, American farmers were able to beat the average annual production rate of the previous five years by 26 percentage points.[56] Merely increasing food production, however, could not completely satisfy all demands. Between September 1942 and May 1943, food prices increased by some 13 percent, which disproportionately affected the poor and caused middle-class anxieties. While the Office of Price Administration (OPA) reacted by establishing price controls and implementing a point system for food purchases, black markets offering specialty goods, which had already worried authorities, continued to spread. Technocratic experts read this as signaling that they had yet to gain civilian cooperation.[57] Ultimately, proponents of war gardening convincingly argued that domestic food production entailed more than material benefits and could help close ideological gaps between the federal government and American

[54] Lawson, 170.
[55] Cf. John W. Jeffries, *Wartime America. The World War II Home Front* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 5, 41, 50-61.
[56] Cf. Lawson, 171
[57] Ibid., 171f.

citizens.[58] In addition to strengthening domestic food production, advocates argued, it would help strengthen morale at home, providing Americans with the means to contribute to the war effort, while simultaneously providing an effective way to promote health and recreation.[59] Gardening, thus, could serve as a propaganda medium to educate the public and shape its values in congruence with the federal government. John W. Jeffries notes that the Second World War home front was "not as repressive or illiberal as the World War I home front, nor did Americans experience the impact of the war or controls over their lives and expression that other World War II belligerents suffered…"[60] This assessment demonstrates how top-down planning efforts were successful within the frameworks they set for themselves — providing sufficient material goods to ensure relative normalcy of domestic everyday life — as well as in the propaganda efforts that convinced Americans to play their part in the wartime economy without consciously experiencing this as a physical, material, or ideological hardship.

Wartime mobilization fundamentally transformed the American economy, substantially increasing the size of the federal government in a country traditionally skeptical toward large governmental structures.[61] Wartime gardening was tightly embedded in this organizational structure. The increasing demand to sustain people and soldiers of Allied forces as well as the domestic population served as an ample reminder of wartime food production and, after initial skepticism was quashed, inspired a top-down revitalization of previous urban agricultural programs. To guarantee and organize sufficient food production, the War Food Administration (WFA) was created and put under the auspices of the USDA. As the Victory Garden program shows, the WFA became structurally entangled with the USDA, with each entity feeding off of as well as contributing to the other: while the USDA's extension agents were to provide the expertise on the ground, by assisting domestic gardeners, helping them increase yields, and providing materials, the WFA's role was to coordinate the production and distribution of food.[62] Propaganda for wartime gardening also fell into the WFA's range of duties. As Cecilia Gowdy-Wygant notes in her study of World War II domestic food production, the WFA developed a program "designed to educate citizens on the vital role of food as a fighting element of victory."[63] In contrast to the focus on sacrifice and self-denial that had characterized World

[58] A core group of these proponents met and organized merely twelve days after the attack on Pearl Harbor at the National Defense Gardening Conference on December 19, 1941. Lawson notes, that "[t]heir focus lay mainly on vegetable gardens on farms, in small- and medium-sized towns, and in suburban areas." Lawson, 174.
[59] Cf. Gowdy-Wygant, 133; Cf. Lawson, 170f.
[60] Cf. Jeffries, 14.
[61] Ibid.,16.
[62] Ibid., 23.
[63] Gowdy-Wygant, 133.

War I food production and consumption, the Roosevelt Administration aimed to ensure the President's promise of "Freedom from Want," which was designated to define the post-war international order. Food production during the Second World War had far more ambitious goals than its First-World-War predecessor — foreshadowing the importance that food would acquire in the post-war international order, when American food aid became a central player of the country's global, neo-colonial aspirations.[64] War Food Administrator, Marvin Jones, could confidently state that food was "just as necessary as guns and tanks and planes,"[65] seeing how the scope of his entity went far beyond servicing the home front. The WFA's tasks were to not only ensure food security at home and on the front lines; the entity additionally aimed to guarantee food for Allied soldiers, citizens, and serve the reconstruction of liberated countries.[66] These ambitious goals demanded an equally ambitious institutional effort: the WFA was tasked with estimating wartime and post-liberation food needs, as well as devising plans to increase food production and to design the most effective and efficient use of the nutritional materials on hand. Cooperations with the Office of Price Administration (OPA), the Office of Civilian Defense (OCD), and the Office of Wartime Information (OWI) helped in getting the word out to the American public and educating citizens on the needs of wartime food production, consumption, and conservation. The *Victory Garden* campaign — advertised as *Garden for Victory* — would become the most prominent symbol of World War II's home front and its success: an estimated 15 million Americans cultivated victory gardens in 1942, producing 7.5 billion tons of food. By 1944, between 18 and 20 million families tended to gardens that produced over 40 percent of the total American vegetable supply.[67]

The dearth of the Great Depression still lingered in the minds of many Americans and gardening as an effort for domestic food production still bore the negative connotations of this era. In order to motivate citizens to take up food cultivation again, the WFA needed to create and disseminate new associations and it used a double strategy to do so. One was to highlight the economic growth the nation had seen in the late 1930s before the war broke out. The other built on this, stressing that the relative prosperity needed to be protected from the dangers of the Axis powers. In this two-fold narrative, war gardening became a weapon of war that would

[64] Cf. Ruttan, Vernon W., ed., *Why Food Aid?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.)
[65] Quoted in Lawson, 171.
[66] Cf. Gowdy-Wygant, 131-133.
[67] As reported by the director of extension programs of the USDA, M.L. Wilson. Cf. Lawson, 171. Sam Bass Warner mentions 44 percent, but unfortunately his footnotes do not offer insight into his sources for this number. Cf. Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *To Dwell is to Garden. A History of Boston's Community Gardens (*Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 19.

help defeat the Axis powers, ensuring — if not resurrecting — the American way of life.[68] The popular term *Victory Gardening* was used widely in propaganda materials and reinforced these patriotic notions. Simultaneously, it highlighted the temporal limits of the practice. By clearly delineating the goal — victory — World War II's garden scheme was framed as a temporary exercise that exemplified the wartime state of exception. After the First World War, war gardeners had renamed their plots *Victory Gardens* in celebration of the accomplishment. The fact that the Second World War crop cultivation scheme now re-awakened this name, not only referenced the past in recalling the positive outcome but also referenced an end — victory — and thus promising a temporal limit to the war.

Gendered Temporalities

In 1943, April became the designated month for gardening. Keeping the climatic diversity of the U.S. in mind, the USDA deemed April the most effective time to start planting summer crops. Thus, USDA agents set out on a publicity tour, and they had prominent help. None other than the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, dedicated parts of the White House lawn for crop cultivation. The USDA heavily promoted the conversion of the symbolic space and called on Americans to "follow the lead of the First Lady in sacrificing for the war effort."[69] The conversion of the White House lawn was no novelty for the American public. In fact, it was almost a tradition. In 1800, John Adams planted a garden outside the White House, which Thomas Jefferson promptly improved on, adding an orchard, when his time in office came. Andrew Jackson had an orangery planted, and — perhaps more present in the minds of Americans — Woodrow Wilson had sheep graze on the South Lawn to promote fuel-saving during World War I. Eleanor Roosevelt now reinvigorated the idea of using the White House lawn for wartime propaganda, and expertly interwove her representational role to transport to the nation the message that it was "the patriotic duty of every person, from the First Lady to the lady next door, to plant and cultivate for victory."[70] Unbeknown to the public, which was enchanted by the patriotic symbolism, Eleanor Roosevelt actually rarely tended to the garden. Instead, the young daughter of a White House staffer took care of the crops, ensuring long-term success of the endeavor.

[68] Cf. Gowdy-Wygant, 134f.
[69] Ibid., 137.
[70] Ibid.

Eleanor Roosevelt, in the meantime, was engaged in a different kind of battle. On countless trips across the nation, she supported female war workers, promoting gender equality in factories and on farms. While women had flocked to fill voluntary positions from early on — the Red Cross alone counted some three million female volunteers — the nation's economy quickly "absorbed available supplies of male workers,"[71] necessitating female labor in the industrial and agricultural sector. Employers, who were often more than reluctant to hire women, begrudgingly changed their hiring preferences. Unmarried women integrated quickly into the labor force — with Fortune magazine noting in 1943 that there were "practically no unmarried women left to draw upon"[72] — and industrial leaders and government planners set out to target married women. The federal government, aided by the media and industrial advertisers, launched an unprecedented campaign to help overcome the skepticism many men and women felt in regard to this. "Indeed," concludes historian Sara M. Evans, "the mobilization of women for industrial work illustrates an extraordinary degree of governmental intervention in the economy and in molding values and attitudes achieved during the war."[73] Working ceaselessly to strengthen progressive developments for women, Eleanor Roosevelt toured the country and advocated for female laborers.[74] However, the sociocultural sentiments about married women in the workforce were strong. While the American Women's Land Army had pushed cultural boundaries surrounding female agricultural labor during World War I, the implementation of such a program now proved difficult. Opposition came from within the USDA as well as political leaders in the capital.[75] Many feared that the absence of mothers in American homes fundamentally threatened the nation's moral character. It was only a matter of time until an outspoken, reactionary opponent would enter the stage. In January 1944, the time had come. J. Edgar Hoover penned an emotional call to American women entitled "Mothers… Our Only Hope":[76]

In the first place, unless family finances absolutely demand it, the mother of young children should not be a war-worker mother, when to do so requires the hiring of another woman to come in and take care of her children.

Hard pressed as our manpower authorities have been, they have adhered steadfastly to the principle that patriotism does not consist in one person or a group of persons giving up

[71] Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty. A History of women in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 221.
[72] Quoted in: Evans, 221.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Cf. Sabine Freitag, "Gewissen der Nation," in *Mrs. President. Von Martha Washington bis Hillary Clinton,* eds. Philipp Gassert and Christof Mauch (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000), 157.
[75] For more information on the American Women's Land Army, cf. Gowdy-Wigant, 115-127.
[76] Quoted in Gowdy-Wigant, 135f. Original publication: Hoover, J. Edgar. "Mothers… Our Only Hope." *Woman's Home Companion*, January 1944, 20. Emphasis in the original Hoover publication.

duties which only they can perform to assume different duties which others can perform just as well or perhaps better.

Motherhood has not yet been classed as a nonessential industry! There is small chance that it will ever be. The mother of small children does not need to put on overalls to prove her patriotism. She already has her war job. Her patriotism consists in not letting quite understandable desires to escape for a few months from a household routine or to get a little money of her own tempt her to quit it. *There must be no absenteeism among mothers*.

That last sentence should, I believe, be taken literally. It is the essence of the whole program. The happy home— the one in which there is no delinquency, no matter which adjective you want to place in front of it— is the home where the child rushes in and calls, "Mother!" and gets a welcoming answer.

To back it up there should be a hot meal ready to serve and a mother fully dressed and ready to receive not only her own children but their friends. […] The mother who does not provide that decent place is definitely falling down on her war job. Whatever rearrangement of her own eating, sleeping and working hours is entailed, she must be ready to give her children and their friends […] hospitality and decency.

While history has since revealed to us how Hoover's message of traditional female roles strongly tied to the domestic sphere framed and shaped the post-war U.S. social order, proving especially impactful during the *Second Red Scare*, American women during the war attempted to bridge the divide between the two positions. The USDA's food programs were welcome resources to aid white, middle-class women in their efforts to provide "hospitable" homes. Transitioning from "wasteful" consumption, these women took particular care to incorporate the national spirit of "decency" through domestic crop cultivation and provide a "hospitable" atmosphere for their consumption. The notion of "hospitality" differs greatly from the domestic ideals we saw emerge during World War I. Where economic management was to be improved, domesticity now began its journey toward emotional shelter and security. The suburban ideal of the post-war nuclear family finds its roots in the media publications that urged women to create the reliable, clean, and hospitable homes that provided "soldiers a mental image of something to fight for."[77]

The WFA continued its seasonal propaganda scheme, designating the beginning of April 1944 *Grow More in '44 Week* in honor of the "success on the farm front."[78] Celebratory articles appeared in newspapers across the nation, many of them following the WFA's example of using the opportunity to educate farmers and war gardeners about more efficient production and cultivation techniques. Addressing homemakers, July became "Home Food Preservation" month.[79] Home demonstrators, who had been trained by extension agents, facilitated teaching sessions and went into homes across the country, showing American women how to prepare

[77] Gowdy-Wigant, 136.
[78] Grow More in '44 Campaign, quoted in Gowdy-Wigant, 137.
[79] Ibid., 137.

their harvests for canning and preserving. They were instructed to use the opportunity to distribute a variety of materials "designed to promote homemakers to take an official pledge to obey rules of rationing, to limit consumption, and to do their part in production by means of gardening."[80] Demonstrators were also trained and encouraged to lead discussions on participation in community food projects as well as the importance of proper nutrition and food during wartimes. Homemakers were given a folder entitled "You Can Shorten the War with Food," where they found a selection of written materials on these subjects as well as the "National Wartime Nutrition Guide."[81] I argue that the focus on food preservation, and on nutritional values and healthy eating, introduced another element to the gendered temporalities of wartime food production. By instilling in homemakers' minds the notion of planning food consumption along the lines of preservation and health, home demonstrators created an extended consciousness of food consumption that pertained not only to framing food consumption along lines of national interest but also spanning beyond weekly meal planning. Popular magazines, like *Time*, joined the national effort to re-frame food consumption, giving rise to article entitle "Eat Your Way to Beauty" that further built on gendered notions of consumption and "proper" female appearance. Furthermore, as Gowdy-Wigant notes, "demonstrators went door to door requesting time to educate housewives about the 'proper' way to recycle, cultivate, prepare, and can food, they also promoted and spread middle-class ideas about how a woman should maintain a home, raise children, and maintain proper gender roles in the home. In this way, the promotion of the home demonstration was, at its core, Americanization."[82]

For middle-class women keen on questioning such affirmations of their traditional roles, August was the revolutionary month. Due to the strain that wartime production put on the labor market, harvesting season proved especially challenging for technocrats. Advocates for female farm laborers, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, had fought extensive battles with Secretary of Agriculture, Claude Wickard, who strongly opposed women working in agriculture, even in spite of growing labor shortages and Allied food insecurity, and mounting evidence from academic research that women could in fact perform agricultural labor. Wickard eventually gave in and the USDA started a call for women to work on farms in 1943. Reflecting American reservations about white, urban, and middle-class women working on farms, the USDA

[80] Ibid., 138.
[81] Cf. Gowdy-Wigant, 138.; Cf. Lawson, 172f.
[82] Gowdy-Wigant, 139.

focused on recruiting immigrant women for the American Women's Land Army.[83] With harvesting season approaching, however, the labor demands left authorities no other choice but to start the "Crop Corps" program, which called to action all men, women, and children to volunteer and help in local harvesting efforts, making J. Edgar Hoover's worst nightmares of working (instead of nurturing) women come true.[84] The fact that the U.S. didn't disintegrate right then and there can be attributed to the fact that the revolutionary harvesting seasons of 1943 and 1944 only lasted one month, after which the WFA could return to its safe space: advocating for the virtues of decreased consumption and food planning in the home, where women assumed their "proper" position as instruction-receivers and hospitality-providers. Also starting in 1943, the WFA declared November as "Food Fights for Freedom Month."[85] This campaign framed wartime food issues according to four general principles: produce, conserve, play square, and share. Addressed to homemakers as well as the larger citizenry, the campaign aimed to intervene in American food consumption habits. It urged citizens to contribute to heightened food production needs (for example by working on farms and growing victory gardens), limit their consumption through conservation (eating "the right foods," meaning economical food substitutions, and avoiding wasting food and resources), adjusting consumption and adhering to rationing and price rules ("playing square" meant to "[p]lace the war first"), and sharing (which served as a frame for rationing).[86] The WFA used the autumn and winter months to increase propaganda about limiting consumption in the home. In cooperation with the OPA, the WFA revived the pledge-signing efforts of World War I, now called the "Home Front Pledge," in which homemakers agreed to buy no more than the allotted amount of food and to refuse black-market products. Coordinating with various other wartime institutions in campaigns candidly framed to advocate "full acceptance of individual responsibility in every home,"[87] the war years ended on the WFA's messages of patriotic subordination and efficient organization of household spheres.

[83] Ibid., 115.
[84] Ibid., 137.
[85] Cf. Lawson, 173.
[86] Ibid., 172f.
[87] Gowdy-Wigant, 138.

An Arsenal of … Gardens?

Considering the extent of centralized planning efforts during World War II and the fact that Detroit was one of the nation's premiere industrial hubs, it comes as no surprise that the city did not assume a leading position in the *Victory Garden* movement. Cities like Boston or Seattle saw the growth of war gardens that, in some cases, remain in cultivation until today.[88] As we saw above, while *Victory Gardens* became a popular and certainly successful phenomenon that contributed substantially to the nation's food production, urban centers, especially those of large cities, remained rather neglected by the institutional machinery that drove the war garden efforts. Detroit transformed, and dramatically so, in other ways: It became known as the *Arsenal of Democracy*. While small-towns and suburbs in areas with less industrial capacity were urged to follow the call that "food will win the war," Detroit's land would see massive construction and extension of production plants as well as housing developments, to accommodate the wartime transformation. Nonetheless, Detroiters were keen to become part of the national Victory Garden efforts, to some degree challenging the technocratic expertise that would rather focus on more efficient production schemes in rural areas. Additionally, the local desires to garden came up against Detroit's increasingly congested environment, giving rise to middle-class, escapist imaginations of suburban pastoralism. The city's population increased dramatically during World War II, as laborers flocked to Detroit hoping to find employment. As a major destination of the Second Great Migration, its racial demographic transformed, too, which would direct the city's economic and political developments after the war. Before we look at efforts to cultivate crops in Detroit, we must first understand the economic and social sea change that took place in the city, which determined its environmental transformation during the war and especially the decades following it.

[88] Cf. Sam Bass Warner on Boston; In his 2018-ASEH presentation in Riverside, Ca., entitled "Sex in the Reeds," Zachary Nowak told the fascinating story of how Boston's *Fenway Victory Garden* became a middle-class bastion that has recently been policing its surrounding environment, displacing homeless people, substance users, and sex workers. Jeffrey Hou has conducted research on the lasting legacies of Seattle's P-Patches, cf. Jeffrey Hou, *Insurgent Public Space. Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Jeffrey Hou, Julie M. Johnson, and Laura Lawson, *Greening Cities, Growing Communities. Learning from Seattle's Urban Community Gardens* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

Detroit's Economic and Social Transformation

When the United States formally entered World War II, its economic transition toward answering wartime demands had already been underway for roughly two years, as Allied nations relied on its support. This had marked the transition of the Motor City into what was subsequently termed the *Arsenal of Democracy*. For the industrial elite, wartimes promised dramatic growth unmatched even by the rapid developments of previous decades. Protected from major risks of investment by the grace of defense contracts, industrialists readily converted and expanded plants, creating numerous jobs, most of them for low-skilled and semi-skilled workers.[89] Detroit, more than any other American city, profited from the temporary economic miracle of World War II, but as history would reveal, this came at tremendous social and environmental cost. Some examples can help us understand the speed as well as the extent of the transition: In August 1940, construction of a $20 million tank plant began in Warren, Detroit's northern suburb. Only six months later, the Chrysler Corporation's facility produced its first tank. Ford's River Rouge plant in Dearborn converted from car production to war production in 1942, employing a record 120,000 workers in a single plant. By 1944, Detroit and its suburbs in Wayne and Oakland County had managed to secure more war contracts than any other place in America. When World War II ended the following year, of all American produced war goods, Detroit factories had produced an overwhelming 92 percent of vehicles, 87 percent of aircraft bombs, 85 percent of helmets, 56 percent of tanks, 50 percent of engines, and 47 percent of machine guns.[90]

Similar to the developments during World War I, the rapid creation of industrial jobs created labor shortages, spurring a migration movement that brought thousands of southern black and white workers north. In 1940, the city's population reached 1.6 million (90 percent whites, 9 percent blacks). Detroit's housing market had already been struggling to keep up with the city's growth. Developers and speculators cunningly worked the system to increase profits, neglecting upkeep and preventing sufficient construction developments so as to keep prices inflated. Meanwhile, the political leadership procrastinated on implementing appropriate solutions. Urban congestion and degradation of the built environment resulted, predominantly affecting new residents of underprivileged economic standing. Emergency defense housing emerged as one top-down method to counteract growing urban congestion in the early war

[89] Cf. Jeffries, 16, 20f.
[90] Cf. Poremba, 123f.

years; however, it "proved insufficient in terms of need and led to racial tensions."[91] These tensions, however, were not solely rooted in political mismanagement. As Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin outline in their seminal study *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, corporate leaders "consciously pitted [white immigrant and black migrant groups] against one another, being most blatant with regard to blacks, who at one time were used exclusively as strike-breakers. Henry Ford elevated the divide-and-rule principle to a full-blown racial strategy."[92] And it didn't take much to foster racist sentiments amongst the working class, as there was already a rich history of stigma to build on. When World War II created the labor shortage that brought southern blacks as well as white Appalachians to the city, these groups found themselves in competition over jobs and housing. Blacks were "locked in narrowly defined ghettos and found social and economic progress virtually nil. […] The old generation of mainly [white] immigrant workers looked upon both newcomer groups with distaste, but found it easier to accept a white hillbilly accent next door than black skin."[93] Public housing was still racially segregated in Detroit in 1942. When black families began to move into the all-white, predominantly Polish Sojourner Truth[94] housing project, several efforts were made to keep them out. A small riot ensued and the families could only move in under police protection. This episode would prove to be a mere precursor to the violence that erupted in Detroit one year later: News of a fight between black and white youth on Detroit's Belle Isle, a popular public recreation area, and false rumors of rape spread across the city. Angry, white mobs soon gathered, attacking black pedestrians at random. In the end, 43 people died, some 1,000 were injured, and property damages lay in the millions. The bloodiest race riot in American history at that point revealed the social divide that ran through the city, and the institutional racism on which it was built. These structures continued to reproduce inequality after the riot: 90 percent of arrestees were black and had to carry the consequences of their charges.[95]

Overall, what blacks of both migrations found in Detroit differed substantially from their dreams of a peaceful and stable life outside the Jim Crow South. It emerged that the idea of a non-racist North had been oversold. Access to jobs and housing was difficult. White workers often made sure that blacks only gained access to the lowest-paid and most dangerous jobs. Housing was segregated by skin color and riots erupted when blacks tried to move into the

[91] Ibid. 123.
[92] Georgakas and Surkin, 154.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Yes, really.
[95] Cf. Dominic J Capeci, Jr. and Martha Wilkerson, "The Detroit Rioters of 1943: A Reinterpretation," in: *Michigan Historical Review* (Vol. 16, No. 1, 1990) 49-72.

white neighborhoods of publicly subsidized housing projects. Many black families ended up cramped into urban slums, living in overcrowded houses that were falling apart. Landlords refused to do repairs while squeezing as much money as they could out of the tenants they looked down upon.

In this dire situation, black migrants quickly faced a problem they had not encountered in their southern homes: hunger. Back in the south, most black families had kept subsistence gardens, in which they grew most of the food they consumed. Many kept chickens, and some even kept hogs and goats. That way, the only expenses they had were for the occasional bag of flour. Now, they had to buy expensive and low-quality foods in supermarkets. Much of the staple produce like okra, collard greens, or even yams was often not even available. Outside the South, people seemed to rely heavily on grain-based foods like bread, which many southern blacks found tasted bland. Additionally, milk and milk-based products like cheese were popular. Recent studies have found that over half of black Americans are lactose intolerant, so people probably had to endure physical discomfort trying to adjust to their new homes. Family dinners, which had once been joyous occasions for banter and pleasure, now lost much of their appeal. Considering how such events were rare occasions for the whole family to spend time together, one can imagine the significance of these changes.

At the center of all these changes stood black women. Black families were often built around traditional gender roles. Men were the ones who looked for work outside the home, while women saw to it that the household functioned with as few expenses as possible. They tended to gardens, made clothes, and cooked the meals. In these new homes, they were now the ones struggling to find fresh produce, suffering from discrimination in white-owned grocery stores, and receiving complaints about meals that had once been their source of pride. Furthermore, due to higher household expenses, many had to try to find paid work outside the home, which brought additional worries about childcare and the erosion of family life with it. Many black women soon felt an especially strong sense of longing for the complex, fresh, and vibrant flavors of home, which were so intimately connected to their garden spaces, communal meals, and ultimately their sense of identity and belonging[96].

To add insult to injury, many migrants of the *Second Great Migration* found it difficult to connect to blacks who had come during the *First Great Migration*. Many of the latter had had to fight hard to gain employment and social acceptance in these dominant white societies.

[96] Cf. Doris Witt, *Black Hunger: Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98; Marcie Cohen Ferris, *The Edible South. The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2014), 97-104.

Now, they feared that these new arrivals were uneducated and lacking the necessary manners and behaviors; in essence, that the new arrivals would make them look bad, while also posing as competition on the labor market, depressing wages. When second wavers brought dishes that had been treasured in their own homes to church gatherings or community groups, first wavers would turn up their noses. They had long forgotten the flavors of okra, collard greens, *Hoppin' John*, or *Chitterlings* (pigs' feet), which they now deemed uncivilized and low-class. Especially during the 1940s, blacks who had come north one or two decades earlier wanted nothing to do with dishes that reminded them of the scarcity of the old days. Forgotten were the creativity and improvisation that went into the creation of these flavorful and rich dishes in times when people had nothing. Some earlier migrants had made it into the ranks of the middle class and reminders of their roots, and the pain and trauma connected to them, were unwanted.[97]

"Instead, the Desire is for Actual Volumes…"

From social and oral histories of black women migrants, we can infer that when time and space permitted it, a number of them engaged in wartime urban agricultural production. Within the technocratic undertaking of economic transformation, race was approached cautiously. Unlike during the First World War, when black contributions were absent in propaganda efforts as well as in media depictions, race now somewhat "figured in propaganda and social attitudes toward the production of food."[98] However, depictions were rare and served to calm white anxieties about racial integration. When black protagonists appeared in the Office of War Information's print or radio campaigns, they were depicted playing supporting, subservient roles or as mammy figures. By depicting black and female household aides rather than black and male factory workers, (female) black agency hardly featured in wartime propaganda. The implied superiority of white women within household settings played into larger efforts to calm growing racial anxieties, in which campaigns "attempted to reassure whites that African Americans accepted segregation as their 'patriotic duty.'"[99] Overall, the renegotiation of American-ness proved even more fragile when it touched on racial issues than on the gendered upheavals around women's roles, especially those of married women, shown above. Victory gardening campaigns did not depict African Americans, which highlights both the agency

[97] Cf. Witt, 82.
[98] Gowdy-Wigant, 140.
[99] Ibid., 144.

connected to patriotic crop cultivation and the inability, or unwillingness, to acknowledge black agency and equality in these efforts. This is especially insightful when we consider urban agriculture campaigns during Detroit's urban crisis, when blacks become the main audience of such campaigns.

As mentioned, centralized planners prioritized smaller urban areas, suburbs, and especially rural areas for civilian crop production during World War II. The prevailing spatial logic that categorized land along measures of production outputs had to come to the conclusion that the increasingly congested city of Detroit could at best provide some visual symbols of wartime gardening's patriotic value. In Michigan, as in the rest of the country, victory gardening was a clear top-down undertaking. At the peak stood the National Victory Garden Program, which provided core programmatic and ideological instructions to state subsidiaries. Detroit victory gardening was organized by the Michigan Victory Garden Program, whose chair, H.D. Hootman worked as an extension horticulturalist at Michigan State University.[100] Hootman, thus, had both expert knowledge of crop cultivation and familiarity with the state's extensive agricultural system. When victory gardening began in Michigan in early 1942, he expressed that there was "no plan to advocate plowing up the city man's lawn […] Instead, the desire is for actual volumes of efficiently produced garden products."[101] At the time, 145,000 out of Michigan's 186,000 farms were reportedly already cultivating gardens for household consumption, and victory garden planners deemed it most effective to first convince the remaining 41,000 farms to follow suit. Furthermore, their strategy was to aid local chapters of the federal Garden Clubs of America, school gardening projects, and other "clients to garden more effectively."[102] The central idea in Michigan was to improve on those local resources that already existed, rather than engage with audiences that might have little or no experience. The Detroit Garden Center was initially even advised to discourage amateur gardeners: "'In line with all the horticultural agencies from the government down,' says Mrs. George I. Bouton, Director, 'we are advising home owners not to give up any of their lawn or ornamental plantings and not to attempt any plantings of vegetables unless the soil and situation warrants it.'"[103] For the time being, urbanites in large Michigan cities were to preserve their ornamental gardens, which would support the war effort by looking beautiful, or so claimed the state program's official stance in early 1942.

[100] In 1943, Paul R. Krone, extension floriculturist at MSU, became Hootman's successor.
[101] "Victory Gardens…," *Ironwood Times*.
[102] Ibid.
[103] "Garden Center to Advise on Victory Plots," *Detroit Free Press*, 15 Feb 1942, 38.

Despite the afterthought, if not nuisance, that urban victory gardening was for some Michigan war-garden planners, Detroit did end up with its own local program. One might expect such an emergence, considering the ideological potential to spread patriotic practices and sentiments. The fact that Detroit's program was driven by municipal actors and local media, could serve as evidence thereof. However, my argument goes beyond the institutional, top-down frame. I argue that victory gardening in Detroit signified critical engagements on the part of officials, agencies, and residents with the local environment, which mirrored economic as well as racial privileges. Within the city, the environmental burdens of congestion — cramped, often dilapidated housing, lack of green spaces, low air quality due to industrial production and increasing car traffic — and increasing decentralization of industry inspired the beginnings of white-flight suburbanization. During the war years, *victory gardens* served to fuel white, middle-class dreams of pastoral living outside of Detroit's bustling streets. The real-estate sections of local papers featured depictions of suburban residences as "Small Farms" for "Countrywise Folks," where it would be "easy to raise sufficient vegetables to maintain the family and enough more to market and thus piece out the family income."[104] Within the local environment, victory gardening thus provided escapist ideas, in which crop cultivation embodied notions of peaceful pastoralism rather than hard physical labor, uncomfortable engagements with pests, and a military, violent ideological context. Local clubs and organizations that were firmly rooted in the local middle-class habitus followed the notion of connecting the pastoral to victory gardening.

Detroit's 1942 Annual Flower Show displayed an idealized version of urban victory gardening, as local media coverage featured an image of the scene and elaborated: "On a full-size city lot stands a typical American home, in the immediate rear of which on one side is a plot 20 by 36 feet with growing vegetables and herbs. Opposite it is a rose garden of similar size. Between them is a path leading to an ornamental garden. Bordering a wide lawn are luxurious shrubs and blooming flowers."[105] Noticeably, this victory garden preserves the normalcy of the "typical American home," keeping ornamental shrubbery and flowery, and cleanly sectioning off the domestic crop production. Vegetables and herbs take up the state-recommended 20 by 36 feet, leaving a significantly larger amount of space for visual appeal. The readers are reminded that ornamental plants, too, serve an effort in victory gardening, helping Americans experience beauty in wartimes. The write-up is accompanied by an image,

[104] Col. Herny H. Burdick, "Back to the Soil: 'Small Farms' Appeal to Countrywise Folks," *Detroit Free Press*, 15 Mar 1942, 36.
[105] "Victory Garden Is Focal Point…," *Detroit Free Press*.

where we see three women looking at the vegetable and herbs section of the garden, with the central figure pointing to it, highlighting its significance while communicating the gendered frame of victory gardening to the reader. A white fence that outlines the garden dominates the forefront of the image, which heightens the impression of protected, middle-class domesticity and order. A number of articles on the Detroit Flower Show use the opportunity to educate readers on proper victory gardening, pointing out the most popular, easy-growing vegetables that will appeal to their flavor preferences. The vegetables on display were grown by Michigan extension agents, the herbs produced in an even more exclusive space: Ms. Ford's own greenhouse.[106] Carefully interweaving expert knowledge and prestige with notions of middle-class taste and normalcy, the media depictions create a heightened sense of responsibility that underlies the narrative. The cultivation of fruit trees also features prominently: "Fruit trees are needed in Victory Gardens. They not only provide valuable food and save transportation but they are ornamental when in bloom in the spring and yield shade in summer."[107] Here we see victory gardening displayed as an opportunity to improve the environment surrounding one's home. Overall, these examples show that for white, middle-class residents of Detroit, victory gardening had less to do with sacrifice for the nation, and more with imagining domesticity within a cleaner, more tranquil, and greener environment.

Within Detroit, victory gardening was organized by the city's Department of Parks and Recreation (DRR), whose staff was familiar with the lack of domestic as well as public green spaces. This affected less economically privileged citizens as well as the middle-class. A newspaper announcement of the municipal *Garden for Victory* program, tellingly, begins with the lines "Detroiters, who always wanted gardens and now can have them and help the defense effort…"[108] Foregrounding the possibility of garden spaces over the political and economic goals of the federally devised program gives further insight into how the local context shaped Detroit's victory gardens. Empty land was scarce in Detroit; the empty parcels (termed "tracts") that the DRR controlled, meaning that they were either city-owned or loaned to the DRR for the purpose of victory gardening, were divided up into individual sections ("plots"), which applicants could gain planting power over on a first-come-first-serve basis. The program did not aim at economically disadvantaged classes, as it demanded considerable financial investments by participants. Within weeks the DRR became so overwhelmed by applications, it halted the process and put out public calls to citizens to make lands of one acre or more

[106] Cf. "Detroit Flower Show Hails Opening of Spring," *Detroit Free Press*, 22 March 1942, 33.
[107] "Victory Garden in Full Bloom," *Detroit Free Press*, 22 March 1942, 35.
[108] "Applications Pour in for Garden Plots," *Detroit Free Press*, 9 March 1942, 1.

available for cultivation.[109] Obviously, enough Detroiters were desperate to garden and did not hesitate to agree to rules, or shoulder costs. Participation came with a set of rigid and extensive rules that had to be signed upon application:[110]

> I promise to make and care for a garden in one of the Community Victory Garden Tracts, sponsored by the Department of Parks and Recreation. I will supply all seeds, plants, tools, sprays and fertilizers. I will begin planting the plot no later than June 1, or as soon as pre-planting preparation is completed. I agree that the produce is for personal use not to be used for commercial purposes. If I fail to keep my plot free from weeds and well cultivated, I agree to forfeit it, after being given due notice, so that it can be reassigned to the next applicant on the waiting list, who will harvest all produce from the time of re-assignment without reimbursement to his predecessor. If for any reason I must be away from my garden for more than two weeks, I will notify the Department of Parks and Recreation. During my absence I will arrange to have the garden cared for. I will not hold the City of Detroit, Department of Parks and Recreation, or the owner of the property responsible for any accidents that may occur on the Community Victory Garden Tract.

The scope of the rules, ranging from financial and material contributions to outlining a regime of care, as well as the punitive possibility of forfeiture, gives insight into the boundaries of voluntary-ness of the program. The municipal authorities demarcate victory gardening as a duty to produce crops for the war effort but also play on the notion of gardening as the assumption of a privilege. One not only has to be able to afford it financially but also compensate for it by providing a predetermined amount of labor. Furthermore, the DRR remains as an authoritative institution over the land and cultivation processes on it, as participants have to report their absences and replacements, putting them in a subservient position. Finally, participants waive compensatory rights in case of accident, and we can safely assume that citizens were not awarded proper health care for their efforts. From a labor rights perspective, these aspects are problematic, especially considering the intense physical strain that crop cultivation entails. Overall, victory gardening can best be described as a form of *coercive volunteerism*.

Where these regulations represent the stick, wartime propaganda would not have been as successful if not accompanied by a metaphorical carrot. A local newspaper, the *Detroit Free Press*, strongly came out in support of a municipal victory gardening program from the outbreak of the war (which very likely helped overcome the aforementioned initial, technocratic reservations). As the more liberal-leaning newspaper in town, the *Free Press*

[109] Cf. "City Seeking Garden Lands," *Detroit Free Press*, 29 March 1942, 5, 39.
[110] City of Detroit, Department of Parks and Recreation, "Application for Community Victory Garden Plot," printed in: *Detroit Free Press*, 9 March 1942, 4.

supported Detroit's *Garden for Victory* program with extensive coverage, regularly devoting entire sections to educating its audience on crop cultivation and accessing victory gardening resources. While the state program continued to focus on war gardening in rural and suburban areas, pooling its resources in those areas, the *Free Press* spread the word about informative events and materials at the Detroit Public Library and the DPP.[111] The paper also frequently integrated gardening into its lifestyle section, interweaving calls to patriotic duty with depictions of urban, middle-class consumerism.

Undoubtedly, the paper had little to lose, supporting a propaganda program that involved a highly popular pastime. After *Gardening for Victory*'s successful inaugural season of 1942, the *Free Press* became further involved, starting a weekly advice column, called *Lessons on Successful Gardening*,[112] and designing a victory garden competition, the *Free Press Victory Garden Contest*. The paper put out calls for participation on its front page and coordinated the launch to "coincide[…] with the opening of Michigan Victory Garden week, a time of preparation officially proclaimed by Gov. Kelly and numerous municipal executives."[113] Aiming to reach participants within and beyond the limits of Detroit, the competition would award a total of $1,500 in War Bonds to "the best" gardens in ten different categories that ranged from city gardens to farm gardens.[114] Besides offering War Bonds as prizes, the *Free Press* also declared the competition as a way to promote war gardening, further positioning itself as an advocate of the victory garden campaign. It is difficult to determine from the sources what the newspaper's criteria for "the best" garden were. It mentions neither yields nor beauty, which could be possible norms.[115] Additionally, the *Free Press* used the opportunity of having direct access to participants, who submitted their addresses upon entry in the competition, to mail them window insignia that stated "This Household is Gardening for Victory," and "a large amount of planting information,"[116] interweaving ideological and material support. The *Free Press*'s support for victory gardening served the program as well as the paper itself, which local automobile mogul Henry Ford praised as "[t]imely, worthwhile and very necessary."[117]

An accurate quantitative assessment of victory gardening in general, as well as in Detroit

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[111] Cf. "Starting Friday: Lessons on Successful Gardening," *Detroit Free Press*, 11 March 1943, 7.
[112] Ibid.
[113] William J. Coughlin, "Total Raised to $1,500 in War Bonds," *Detroit Free Press*, 21 March 1943, 1.
[114] Eight of the categories awarded gardens in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties that make up the greater Detroit metropolitan area. Two categories were dedicated to urban and farm gardens "anywhere in the State of Michigan."
[115] Cf. Coughlin, 1.
[116] William J. Coughlin, "First V-Garden Emblem Is Posted in Detroit Home," *Detroit Free Press*, 22 April 1943, 10.
[117] William J. Coughlin, "Henry Ford Praises Free Press Drive," *Detroit Free Press*, 21 February 1943, 1.

in particular, is a difficult task. As the practice was part of wartime propaganda, the officials who published numbers on the program had a vested interest in presenting large numbers and possibly exaggerating rather than underselling outcomes. Furthermore, not all victory gardens would live up to what one might imagine them to be: some enthusiasts considered that windowsill pots counted as contributions. It seems that including ornamental planting in victory gardening served to broaden the audience, facilitating larger numbers of citizens to consider themselves as part of the movement. This reveals a tension between the technocratic focus on efficient and effective production on the one hand, and considerable leeway when it came to ideological functions of the practice that aimed at involving as many Americans as possible on the other. When we look at victory garden numbers in Michigan, we must keep in mind the state's strong agriculture sector, which contributed considerably to wartime domestic food production. In 1943, the Wayne County Council of Defense reported some 252,000 victory gardens that produced over $5,000,000 in food and covered over 10,500 acres.[118] The Detroit Neighborhood War Club reported 160,000 victory gardens within the city limits and estimated the average size to be 1,500 square feet. Paul Krone, head of the Michigan Victory Garden Program, estimated some 800,000 victory gardens were cultivated in the state.[119] For the following year, he projected a 25 percent increase[120], which Michiganders reportedly beat, bringing the total to 1,032,882.[121]

Nationally, the victory garden program was certainly celebrated and perceived as a success in terms of production of food as well as ideological support for the war. When in early 1944, War Food Administrator Marvin Jones announced a planned increase in food exports to soldiers and Allied nations of an additional two percent (increasing the total of exports from 25 to 27 percent), he expressed confidence that victory gardening would make up for the difference in domestic grocery stores. "I'm afraid we can't forecast any relief in rationed foods, but there are some hopeful signs for victory gardeners: The WPB is releasing more pressure cookers and freezing units for preserving the food you do raise this year. You won't have to

[118] Wayne County holds the city of Detroit as well as a number of its suburbs. In 1943, when suburban sprawl hadn't yet taken over the county, suburbs blended into rural areas, where larger victory gardens would have been more likely. Additionally, it is important to note, that the estimated amount of $5,000,000 ($76m) drew considerable criticism. Officials estimated that $500 ($7,260) worth of food were produced per acre. Critics argued that this number was too low. Following this model, the total of food produced in Detroit in 1943 would come down to $275,500 ($3.9m). Cf. "252,000 Wayne Gardens Yield $5,000,000 in Food," *Detroit Free Press*, 5 September 1943, 35. Brackets indicate the 2018 values of the amounts, cf. "Seven Ways…".
[119] Cf. "252,000 Wayne Gardens Yield $5,000,000 in Food," *Detroit Free Press*, 5 September 1943, 35.
[120] Cf. "Cut in Food Due in '44, Jones Says," *Detroit Free Press*, 24 February 1944, 5.
[121] Cf. "Inaugurate Garden Program," *Battle Creek Enquirer*, 29 January 1945, 5.

use up ration points buying canned stuff if you grow it."[122] Jones would be proven right by American victory gardeners, who pushed themselves to produce record numbers of vegetables in 1944. When the war ended the following year, many expressed the wish to continue gardening. However, once again the rules of spatial commodification prevailed and while some Victory Gardens evolved into community gardens, most of these spaces were soon covered in concrete.

The Lingering Effects of Victory

Over the course of the 20th century, Detroit was home to many political activists and groups. However, no individual or entity has arguably shaped the city longer and in more diverse ways than James and Grace Lee Boggs. Their origins could hardly have been more different and yet, their shared political interests and values eventually brought them together in the Motor City. Their decades of activism intersected with a period of massive economic transformation in Detroit and beyond, and culminated, shortly before James Boggs's death in 1993, in an urban agriculture program that still exists today and continues to shape the local, contemporary, and progressive urban farmers. For now, James and Grace Lee Boggs shall provide a deeper gaze into the historical and philosophical background that has accompanied, and struggled against, Detroit's inevitable deindustrialization after the Second World War. When Grace Lee first came to Detroit in the early 1950s, the city was at peak capacity with some two million inhabitants. Suburbanization, deindustrialization, and white flight had already started to set in and would be accelerated by highway construction that conveniently connected suburban residences with downtown workplaces. By 1960, the population had already declined to 1.6 million with the percentage of whites going from 83 percent to 70 percent. Yet, Grace Lee had come to the city at just the right moment. Her activism for civil rights and workers' rights coincided with some of the most tumultuous and challenging moments in the city's history and she brought the energy to meet them. Her origins, however, could not have been further from Detroit's black working-class community, of which she was a vital part for some 65 years.

[122] "Cut in Food…," 5.

Detroit's Revolutionaries

Grace Chin Lee was born in Rhode Island in 1915 to Chinese immigrants. Her father's restaurant businesses facilitated a middle-class upbringing that included secondary and tertiary education. After graduating from Barnard College in 1935, she enrolled as a PhD student at Bryn Mawr, where she eventually chose the field of philosophy. Kant and Hegel became her intellectual passion, the latter shaping her philosophical and political conception of the world for the rest of her life. While she took issue with Hegel's dismissal (euphemistically speaking) of Africa in his musings on world history, "four sets of ideas […] in large measure formed a foundation of her own intellectual work and political vision: a recognition of the duality of the positive and negative in everything, the idea of contradictions as a historical and political force, the need to create new ideas as reality changes, and a sense of history as a continuing struggle to determine what it means to be free."[123] Grace's philosophical formation was driven by her conviction that theoretical conceptions had to be complemented by practical, real-world engagement, that thinking was a "practical activity," and while she appreciated Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, she ended up focusing on the work of American pragmatist George Herbert Mead in her PhD thesis.[124] Mead's conception of ideas as powerful instruments to change society (also the core of Hegel's philosophy), inspired Grace and when she was unable to find work after finishing her degree — in the America of 1940 her race (and to a lesser degree her gender) disqualified her for most positions beyond secretarial work — she moved to Chicago, hoping to find inspiration in the city that had intellectually shaped Mead (as well as John Dewey, the more famous representative of American Pragmatism). Moving to this new city certainly brought new experiences into her life. With hardly any funds, she was forced to move into a "rat-infested hole" and take a job at the philosophy library of the University of Chicago. In 1941, Grace joined a black housing organization. This brought her into contact with the Workers Party (WP) and Chicago's black community. Both groups shaped her political identity: the Trotskyite Workers Party instilled the notion of "permanent revolution" in her thinking and connected her with key figures of the radical left like C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Max Shachtman. Boggs's insistence on the term "revolution" would later shape Detroit's urban agriculture activism and she developed a philosophical concept of revolutionary urban community life that centered around urban, intergenerational, and

[123] Stephen M. Ward. *In Love and Struggle. The Revolutionary Lives of James and Grace Lee Boggs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 2016), 79f.
[124] Cf. Ward, 80.

communal crop cultivation as a form of political, spatial expression. Political education and discussion connected the experience of labor with larger ideas about economic, social, and cultural aspects of urban life. Another aspect of Boggs's later urban agricultural engagement finds its roots in her time in Chicago. Working with the local black community and supporting their strong antiwar stance eventually brought her into contact with A. Philip Randolph and the *March on Washington Movement* for which she produced strongly worded political essays.[125] The WP's ideological battle over the so-called Russian Question — what was the nature of the Soviet Union? — led to the formation of the "State Capitalist Tendency", or "Johnson-Forest Tendency" (JFT), a group surrounding C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya,[126] who argued, citing the Hitler-Stalin Pact, that the Soviet Union was a state-capitalist system, not a bureaucratic collectivist project. In a chance meeting, Grace and C.L.R. James bonded over their shared affection for Hegel and Marx, and soon after, Grace moved to New York City, where the JFT had its headquarters.[127] During her time there, Grace stood out due to her unabating energy and intellectual incisiveness in group discussions. The JFT worked collaboratively: they developed their stances in group discussions and even producing texts was a collaborative effort. As the distinguished Boggs scholar Stephen M. Ward notes, this form of political discussion enabled the group to draw on each other's specific skills. "JFT members not only learned from each other, they grew to rely on each other as cotheorists and cocreators of knowledge [sic]."[128] The collective, discursive development of thought would stay with Grace throughout the rest of her life, as would the friendship of the activist couple Freddy and Lyman Paine. Grace later commented, that "[w]hat I internalized during those years was the importance of always keeping one's ear to the ground to hear the new questions that are being asked at the grassroots; always combining real struggles with philosophical

[125] Most noteworthy is her essay "The Negro Question," in which she demonstrated her early understanding of the black situation in America during WW II: "Thirteen million Negroes in America have never known three of the "Four Freedoms" which America is supposedly spreading to the rest of the world. 'Freedom from want' is a mockery to Negroes when they are last to be hired and first to be fired […] 'Freedom from fear' is a myth to Negroes when they have no recourse against the 'righteous' Southern citizenry who periodically find excuses to hold lynching parties; against the Northern citizenry who magnify every petty theft into a crime wave; or against those military police whose trigger fingers itch to soil a Negro soldier's uniform with blood. 'Freedom of speech' is meaningless to millions of Negroes who are kept in enforced ignorance and illiteracy by the most meager educational facilities in the South and who are sent to the most crowded schools in the North, so that throughout the country, 2,700,000 Negroes (or more than twenty per cent of the total Negro population) have had no schooling beyond the fourth grade. 'Freedom of religion' is the only one of the 'four freedoms' for the Negro which the ruling class has encouraged." Quoted in Ward, 98.

[126] The name is an allusion to the party-names of C.L.R. James (J.R.Johnson) and Dunayevskaya (Freddie Forest). Socialist and Communist activists often adopted such pseudonyms to evade scrutiny by the FBI.

[127] Cf. Ward, 99-102.

[128] Ibid., 103.

exploration."[129] While Grace always maintained Hegel's conception of history as a dialectical process of progress, in which every positive entails negative reactions (what Grace referred to as "contradictions"), which then need to be struggled with and overcome (again resulting in positive as well as negative results, and so forth), she also internalized that these theoretical musings must frequently be checked against "reality." This credo demanded close contact with workers and an awareness of their (changing) concerns. This would ensure that the theoretical work remained connected to changes in society as well as economics or politics. As Grace understood her role in the world to be that of a revolutionary working to empower the subaltern, she saw her mission as "always being on the alert for the changes taking place in reality that force us to break loose from the fixed concepts that have come out of earlier struggles; always recognizing that everything and everyone contains contradictions so that what was progressive at one stage can become reactionary at another."[130] This theoretical conception of societal change demanded alertness and sensitivity to the ever changing yet continuous struggles of working-class minorities, which both Grace Lee and James Boggs would cultivate in myriad ways throughout the decades of their activism.

At the heart of such a conception of the world lies the notion that history continuously moves toward the now, that everything that happened in the past conditioned the present moment to be exactly as it is, because the ideas of the past have produced this present. Ideas, thus, hold tremendous power. They have their own agency, and this agency shapes history. As activists, the Boggses approached their work from the premise that emerges here, which is that ideas can function as generative engines that may produce certain desired outcomes. The details of how to accelerate the revolutionary potential of ideas were, of course, subject to much debate within the radical left at the time. Could a (world) revolution emerge without the efforts of a vanguard party? How would an American revolution relate to the revolutionary potential in other parts of the world? Did American capitalism differ from Marx's Eurocentric observations and were theoretical adjustments necessary? Over the course of the 1940s, C.L.R. James, Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee Boggs developed distinctive positions that set them and the JFT apart from large parts of their constituency. C.L.R. James in particular, pushed for recognition of the "Negro Question" and called for the WP "to encourage and assist a mass black organization and movement based on the everyday struggles and demands of black people."[131] The group drew on Lenin's writing on the 1916 rebellion in Ireland and highlighted the need

[129] Quoted in Ward, 110f.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid., 114.

for the self-determination of a mass black movement, which signified a further break with socialist orthodoxy.[132] Instead of envisioning organized labor as a vanguard, the JFT placed front and center the creative expression of the working masses, often looking to specifically American examples in history to identify and distill revolutionary potential in American society and culture. Unlike most Marxist thinkers, the JFT did not differentiate between the young and the old Marx.[133] Grace, who spent considerable time translating early manuscripts by Marx into English, was especially taken by his notion of alienation. While she would later stray from other central Marxist tenets and transform her understanding of revolutionary processes, she maintained that at the very core of our existence, we strive for self-consciousness, which in Marxist terms meant more than "the insight of a few philosophers, but the active participation of all men in social life, beginning with production, and expressing and developing their natural and acquired powers."[134] This view reframes revolutions as assemblages that result from the liberation and empowerment of individuals. Here, revolution emerges from networks formed through human creativity and improvisation, chance, and the free exchange of ideas. Decades later, Grace Lee would discover the *Gardening Angels* as such a creative and informal engine of change, and integrate their urban agricultural practices into her political efforts.

Grace Lee Boggs's reading of Marx can help us understand and conceptualize the significance she later found in urban agriculture. For Marx, who was applying the teleological analytical methodologies of Hegel, the production process turned individual labor into the private property of others that could be measured objectively and commodified, alienating and disempowering the individual worker who is dominated by the result of their labor. Abolishing private property altogether, which some have envisioned as a solution to counteract alienation, did not appeal to Marx, who argued that while alienation emerges out of the labor process, it also entails creative and positive elements that can facilitate processes to overcome alienation.[135] Framing labor as dialectical spoke to Grace on different levels. Her experiences with black public housing advocates as well as the *March on Washington* movement had demonstrated to her the vital necessity of active participation and the empowering effects stemming from it. During her time with the JFT, Grace used these insights as a foundation for conceptualizing a distinctly American notion of revolutionary change, which centralized the black experience.[136]

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[132] Ibid., 115.
[133] Ibid., 119.
[134] Ibid., 120.
[135] Ibid., 118-120.
[136] Ibid., 113.

As one of the nation's centers of black working-class life, Detroit seemed destined to be the stage for a culmination of the revolutionary potential that Grace and her JFT fellows envisioned. As the group broke away from the Fourth International, the 1950s would bring several transformations to the JFT and Grace Lee Boggs. Following the break, the JFT relocated to Detroit and start its new publication project, *The Correspondence Publishing Committee*. Native Trinidadian C.L.R. James was arrested on visa charges and deported in 1952, which propelled Grace into a new leadership position. The group's relocation to Detroit came with a conceptual remaking of their practice. As they had rejected the elitist conception of a philosophical vanguard, the new bottom-up approach identified four groups — or layers — as revolutionary social forces in America: rank-and-file workers, blacks, women, and youth. The new organizational focus and clientele brought with it an ideological shift that would unfold over the next decade and see the group move further away from Marxism and toward a Third Worldist reframing of capitalism's racialized logic of growth. In the midst of the Second Red Scare[137] and the heightening tensions of the Cold War, *Correspondence* shifted its political gaze toward the African continent and the struggles of local peasants, decrying American imperialism as well as using the racial vector to rethink the specificities of American capitalism and the long-term implications of racialized political economies.[138] Just as Detroit's economy was beginning to shift fundamentally, members of *Correspondence* began to synthesize the city's labor activism, black anti-segregation efforts, and growing notions of black nationalism into a radical and diverse organization. In this way, Detroit became more than a backdrop for *Correspondence*, molding the group in its image.[139] A grassroots discussion group, the *Third Layer Group*, became the chief forum for exchange of ideas. And it quickly came to the attention of James "Jimmy" Boggs, a young, black, and radical autoworker who had come to Detroit from Alabama.

For some ten years after his deportation, C.L.R. James remained in close contact to the Correspondence group. However, as Grace Lee and Jimmy Boggs (who married in the early 1950s, shortly after they met) had taken over the philosophical, ideological, and organizational leadership, the group continued to move away from central Marxist tenets and toward black

[137] In 1953, Detroit attracted the attention of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) that held hearings in the city. Coleman Young, Jr. used his testimony to make a bold statement about racist violence against blacks and the systemic denial of black civil rights, earning him the sympathies of many Detroit's who were listening to the statements on the radio, earning him high regards among many Detroit blacks. Cf. Ward, 151.
[138] Cf. Ward, 135, 140.
[139] Ward comments on this: "Detroit did not simply serve as the backdrop to their activities; it furnished specific spaces of political engagement and sources of theoretical development, including the labor movement, black community struggles against segregation, and black nationalist politics." Ibid.

radicalism, replacing faith in the agency of the working masses with the belief that the black freedom struggle held the key to unlocking workers' solidarity and offsetting an emancipatory and distinctly American revolution. Jimmy Boggs's 1963 publication of *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Workers Notebook* finalized the split with C.L.R. James by straying from basic Marxist premises. Jimmy analyzed the shrinking employment numbers in industrial production and compared them to increasing production outputs, arguing that the cyclical unemployment that Marx had regarded as accumulation's historical tendency differed fundamentally from the current goings-on. While the mechanization of the 19th century had prompted displaced farmers to seek employment in urban and industrializing areas, automation would not come with substitute opportunities for paid labor. Displaced workers would now have nowhere to go. In Jimmy's eyes, a new underclass was forming, made up of "outsiders" who were either recently displaced or "who were outsiders to begin with. These millions have never been and never can be absorbed into this society at all. They can only be absorbed into a new type of society whose first principle will have to be that man is the master and not the servant of things."[140] Foreseeing a fundamental political crisis in American politics over the welfare of this new underclass, he called for a fundamental re-conception of American identity based on a definition of "human worth separate from the sphere of productive labor." C.L.R. James strongly rejected this fundamental challenge to the conceptualizations of both socialism as well as communism, and somewhat bitterly advised the group to acquire more training in Marxist theory.[141] Jimmy and Grace Lee Boggs had grown more concerned with the implications of automation on black employment than adhering to Marxist orthodoxy. In their view, Marx's Eurocentric work could not fully illuminate the relationship between economic change and the black struggle for democratic rights. Jimmy's understanding of the civil rights movement directly related it to automation and black redundancy in American capitalism.[142] Detroit with its growing number of blacks and closing plants seemed destined to become a focal point for "the other America," the one that was left behind economically, socially, and culturally. In other words, the America of the "revolutionary masses."[143]

A few months after the split from C.L.R. James, Grace Lee and Jimmy Boggs moved into 3061 Field Street on the city's east side. The house soon became a movement center for radical black activists. Early publications foreshadowed the rise of black nationalism and

[140] Matthew Birkhold, "Doing for Our Time What Marx Did for His: Constituting the Boggsian Challenge to Marxist Praxis," in: Souls 13:3 (2011), 247.
[141] Ibid., 236.
[142] Cf. Ward, 307f.
[143] Ibid., 144.

highlighted the growing divide between civil rights and white labor activists. A 1963 publication, for example, decried the way in which "the ideological paternalism which socialists have always maintained in regard to the Negro struggle is only white supremacy in a radical guise" and declared that "revolutionary philosophical and political leader ship [sic!] can only come from the Negroes."[144] Maintaining that cultural expression and creativity form the core of political identities, these early publications from the Boggses' circle foreground and emphasize black cultural life in Detroit. Later, cultural and artistic expression would become core elements of urban agricultural place making, with children and community members teaming up together to make pictorial and sculptural statements in their garden spaces, publicly displaying and celebrating cultural histories of American and pan-African blackness.

In the early to mid-1960s, black radicalism was still waiting to break free in Detroit. The city was home to a number of prominent civil rights leaders, such as Rev. C.L. Franklin (father of famed singer Aretha) and Black Liberation theologian Rev. Albert Cleage (who took on the name Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman in the early 1970s), who would soon enough quarrel over the direction of the city's civil rights movement. Rev. Franklin, pastor of the New Bethel Baptist Church, elevated the city to national significance by organizing the 1963 "Freedom March," which formally launched the Detroit Council for Human Rights (DCHR) and drew between 125,000 and 250,000 participants. A follow-up event later the same year revealed the ideological differences between Franklin and Cleage, which had been boiling underneath the surface. Over the July 4 weekend, the death of Cynthia Scott once again demonstrated the devastating effect of police violence on Detroit's black community, elevating calls for black self-determination. Rev. Franklin, who opposed including radical groups like the Black Panthers, and Rev. Cleage split over the issue with the latter eventually sponsoring the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference where Malcom X gave his infamous "Message to the Grassroots" address. Grace Lee served as one of the leading organizers and Jimmy as the conference's chairperson, but their involvement remained rather inconspicuous, perhaps due to the generous attention the FBI had imposed upon them. The event did, however, help reinvigorate the discussion on the future of black workers in face of automation, which Jimmy had sparked with his publication in the previous year. As the "Black Revolution" of 1963 was coming to a climax, Jimmy's reading of the civil rights movement and automation as interrelated social phenomena helped propel the discourse on black economic self-

[144] Quoted in Ward, 293.

determination within the black nationalist and black power movements.[145] Today, some of Detroit's urban agriculture proponents who advocate for community food security and food autonomy build their arguments for urban agriculture on black communities' need to be autonomous and subsistent in face of the intertwined threats of racism and economic discrimination. Community resilience and food justice advocacy has thus carried this history into the 21st century.

It was in the midst of this revolutionary year 1963 that Grace first began describing their philosophy as "dialectical humanism." This concept that centralized a reformist notion of human evolutionary "revolution" as driving social change, established the philosophical foundation of the later urban agriculture project, *Detroit Summer*. The split from C.L.R. James (and orthodox Marxism) may have liberated the couple and their ever-growing constituency to take the next step in their ideological formation toward conceptualizing a new American revolution. While the couple remained rooted deeply within black radical circles, Grace declared that "the revolution which has now begun ... is not just a Negro revolution .... What is involved is a totally new and uniquely American revolution, a revolution without historical precedent anywhere in the world, a revolution which essentially will have to bring about a radical change in man's image of himself and of rights and responsibilities, to correspond with the revolutionary changes that have been achieved in material production .... The philosophy of this new revolutionary struggle for new human values and new human relations we call Dialectical Humanism."[146] Her diagnosis saw the struggle to develop technological solutions for the problems of material production as "essentially […] solved," and predicted the dawn of a new epoch "when the burning question is how to create the kind of human responsibility in the distribution of material abundance that will allow everyone to enjoy and create the values of humanity."[147] Central to this new conception were relationships between human beings beyond and above class distinctions, the boundaries of which composed the skeleton of Marxist theory. The struggle for civil rights and the race-class nexus undergirding the American story of techno-economic progress called for an expansion of minds and perspectives. Where Marx had distinguished between dialectical and historical materialism, creating neatly distinct categories of philosophical and technological development, the Boggses methodologically obscured the line by subsuming historical materialism under dialectical materialism, and

[145] Ibid., 307
[146] Quoted in Ward, 321.
[147] Quoted in Ward, 322.

declaring it a dying epoch.[148] Boldly, they concluded that the era in which history was written by the force of class struggle was now going to be driven by broader struggles to "create human social relationships."[149] Whereas human value had hitherto been socially, culturally, and ideologically based in economic production, Jimmy Boggs built on automation replacing the need for human wage labor and argued that "work is becoming socially unnecessary."[150] With disappearing labor activity and scarcity, "class distinctions marked by differing degrees of political power and consumption abilities could also be eliminated,"[151] freeing people of racial, class, or national differences and enabling cooperative relations. Approaching this paradigm shift from the perspective of radical black activists, Jimmy highlighted the need to forego integrationist tendencies and instead redefine "human relationships in ways that were not premised upon exploitation."[152] Detroit's history continued to provide ample opportunities to verify the need for such a new philosophical premise and challenge Grace Lee and Jimmy Boggs to find new ways of implementing it. With the rebellion of 1967, this became even more evident. Police violence and economic discrimination culminated in a violent eruption that quite literally led to Detroit becoming occupied territory of various forces of white authority. In the eyes of Grace and Jimmy, this transformed the premise of the local revolutionary process and prompted them to focus more on the role and contested agency of black, male, poor, and urban youth.[153]

Over the next decades, the Boggs would build numerous and diverse organizations around the exploration and implementation of dialectical humanism. The central idea that the United States was the "technologically most advanced and the politically and socially most counter-revolutionary"[154] country in the world foregrounded sociopolitical activism as well as the celebration of cultural identities and values. In 1978, the Boggses and members of their inner circle founded the National Organization for an American Revolution (NOAR), which became their main occupation for the next decade. The organization aimed to propel the notion of a self-governing United States driven by citizens who enact political and social responsibility and are willing to carry out a "'two-sided transformation,' or working to change oneself and the oppressive structures of society simultaneously."[155] However, as NOAR was fighting the

[148] Ibid., 323.
[149] Ibid., 323.
[150] Birkhold, 248.
[151] Ibid., 248.
[152] Quoted in Birkhold, 252.
[153] Cf. Ward, 325.
[154] Ibid., 328.
[155] Ibid., 329.

good fight, the organization's members were under no illusion about the changing times they were witnessing. As the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement was fading, with black radicalism succumbing to subversion and decimation by assassination, and urban centers across the country turning either into violent drugscapes or gentrified havens for the up-and-coming yuppies, Detroit's revolutionaries "concluded that blacks had become a special interest group fighting primarily for inclusion into the American social–economic–political structure."[156] Once again, the relationship between capitalism and its subjugated had changed, demanding adjustments.

[156] Birkhold, 252.

IV. Government Intervention: Urban Agriculture in the Age of Detroit's Urban Crisis (1967-1994)

Government Intervention

When Coleman Young, Jr. took office in early 1974, Detroit was in the midst of a new acceleration in its *hunger crisis*, as local media put it. The oil crisis of the previous year had caused a dramatic and enduring increase in unemployment. Detroit was hit especially hard, because large parts of its economy were still heavily dependent on the car manufacturing industry that now saw further incentives to cut costs, and jobs. The number of unemployed Detroiters rose to 140,000 in 1975, when Detroit's population had shrunk to just under 1.5 million. And with the waning of jobs, food security further eroded all across the city. Between 1973 and 1975 alone, food prices rose by 41 percent. Among those who had become economically and socially marginalized, children were especially affected by hunger and malnutrition.[1] A fear of new outbreaks of violence lingered over the city.

For the mayor of Detroit, this situation was more than challenging. His inauguration coincided with President Nixon's *New Federalism* agenda that slashed many federal welfare and urban renewal programs, which would mean even less money for his administration.[2] In addition, Detroit's debt had reached worrisome levels. There was even talk of a municipal bankruptcy trial. In this climate, Coleman Young knew that it was upon him to deliver tangible solutions. And they needed to be cheap to be feasible. Young read about Hazen S. Pingree's successful urban farming program for the city's hungry and saw potential in the idea. Well aware of the problem of empty land burning holes in the city's pockets, Young hoped that urban agriculture had the potential to occupy and thus upkeep these spaces in beneficial and socially progressive ways. Young devised a plan to turn liabilities into assets by offering them up for farming — and advocating strongly for easy and cheap sales conditions for such properties, in case anyone was interested.[3] The program that began in 1975 was called *Farm-A-Lot*.

Two years after this municipal program started in Detroit, a federal urban agriculture initiative, locally called *Growing Roots*,[4] began. Its main objective was to alleviate food security by advocating for urban agriculture practices and supporting its members by disseminating information on plant cultivation and offering practical and theoretical assistance

[1] Cf. Ann R. Beser, "Project Summary", 29 Sept., 1975. In: Coleman Young Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Box 46, Folder 11, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
[2] Cf. "An analysis of the impact on the people of the city of Detroit caused by the federal budget beginning July, 1973," study, Box 4: Folder 18, Coleman Young Papers, Walter P. Reuther Archive.
[3] They weren't.
[4] The official name was *USDA Cooperative Extension Urban Garden Program*. For the sake of readability, I have chosen to use the name *Growing Roots* throughout the text.

in their endeavors. Significantly, and in contrast to the municipal program, *Growing Roots* entailed actual funding and a strong institutional link. While *Farm-A-Lot* provided access to growing spaces, seeds, and some tools, the most fundamental resource needed in gaining access to food cultivation and preservation — the knowledge of how to do it — was by and large covered by its monthly newsletter. *Growing Roots* expanded this area significantly. Utilizing the expertise of the Michigan Cooperative Extension Service, the program offered its members "assistance in the areas of food production, utilization, preservation and nutrition."[5] This meant that members could gain the assistance of extension agents, who were usually trained horticulturalists or Master Gardeners,[6] to help with crop cultivation issues, and participate in various educational workshops "in specialized content areas, such as canning, mulching, [and] nutrition."[7] Education and knowledge dissemination drove this government intervention as much as it had signified the core agendas of previous progressive projects in American history. Furthermore, *Growing Roots* staff maintained demonstration gardens in "various parts of the community [that] provided residents with a visual image of what a successful garden would be like in their community."[8] This expansive program made urban agriculture more accessible to inner-city residents, especially those that had no prior experience in growing crops.

However, the benefits of institutional resources like those of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) came with heavy baggage. Keep in mind the social engineering that is a recurrent theme in the institutional history of agrarian scientification that I explored in chapter II. We saw clearly how agricultural institutions operated as a settler colonial tools of governing the domestic sphere of economically, geographically, and racially disadvantaged Americans. Framing the problem — othering and devising corrective measures — directed the solutions that these institutions then worked to implement. In this chapter, I argue that these top-down

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[5] Michigan 4-H Youth Program, "Growing Roots: Abstract", Records of the Extension Service, Box 29, Entry 64, Records of Studies Pertaining to 4-H, Chronological File of Studies and Theses: 1977, National Archives and Record Administration.

[6] The Master Gardener Program originated in the early 1970s in Washington State. David Gibby and William Scheer, who worked as Area Extension Agents, were overwhelmed by requests for help in urban gardening endeavors and started this program that would train and certify experienced volunteers in the "art and science" of gardening. After a successful inaugural year of training in 1973, the program spread across the U.S. through land-grant universities and their cooperative extension services. It maintains these institutional connections until today and is, thus, programmatically closely tied to the USDA. Michigan's Master Gardener Program began in 1978, until 1996, the program had established itself in all 50 states. Cf. David Gibby, William Scheer, Sharon Collmen, George Pinyuh, Tonie Fitzgerald, "The Master Gardener Program a WSU Extension Success Story Early History from 1973," updated by Tonie Fitzgerald, Oklahoma State University, 2008, http://oces.okstate.edu/canadian/horticulture/master-gardener/MasterGardenerProgramHistory.pdf; Gail Ann Langellotto; Moen, David; Straub, Terry; Dorn, Sheri: "The First Nationally Unifying Mission Statement and Program Standards for Extension Master Gardener Programs at Land-Grant Universities," *Journal of Extension*, 53, no.1 (Feb. 2015), https://joe.org/joe/2015february/iw1.php (accessed 14 Jan, 2020).

[7] MI 4-H, "Growing Roots: Abstract".

[8] Ibid.

urban agriculture programs in Detroit's era of urban crisis continued a settler colonial framework that othered and then attempted to reform participants. We can detect parallels to other progressive reformers who displayed similar paternalism; however, it is crucial to keep in mind that urban agriculture was a government-driven, institutionally based effort to reform urban, black, and poor people while economic resources continued to be funneled into white, suburban pockets. As I explore below, the CES was relatively progressive, and many of its employees made honest efforts to help inner-city and economically underprivileged blacks. However, if we expand our gaze and take seriously the many continuities of anti-emancipatory and patronizing ideas, such reformist institutions start to form a line of evolving attempts to govern heterogenous societies. As *Growing Roots* was funded by the federal government, concise rules and regulations determined the extent of the services offered. Furthermore, the funding had to be justified and re-approved regularly in annual congressional budget hearings. For one, this meant that the program operated in a precarious position, torn between demonstrating a need for itself, showing tangible, positive benefits, and working to become dispensable. "The program's ultimate goal is to develop expertise within this community that will exist after the Growing Roots program is over"[9] wrote Michigan State University Extension Specialist Ralph Abbott in 1977, the inaugural year of *Growing Roots*. This suggests that the there was a keen awareness of the temporary nature of this urban agriculture program. Injecting knowledge into these communities that would enable their members to produce food after the program ended was in line with the neoliberal turn in welfare politics.

Structurally, *Growing Roots* was administered through the 4-H youth organization of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES), which itself formed a branch of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Children and youth, predominantly from low-income economic backgrounds, were obviously the target audience of 4-H. However, participation in the *Growing Roots* program specifically was open to all ages and broadly targeted low-income residents and families. The umbrella structure of the CES, and the guiding philosophy of 4-H, shaped the goals as well as the approaches of *Growing Roots*. While today urban agriculture is increasingly becoming a small but growing economic sector in cities like Detroit, urban crop production under the auspices of 4-H by and large focused on subsistence practices and educational values. Furthermore, *Growing Roots* began at a time when the USDA and CES were coming under mounting pressure for structurally disadvantaging African Americans.[10]

[9] Ibid.
[10] Cf. Don F. Hadwiger, "The Freeman Administration and the Poor," *Agricultural History 45:1* (Jan 1971), 21f.

While the USDA overall was more than reluctant to change, the CES and its youth organization 4-H did attempt to re-invent themselves and go with the times. However, as we explore below, these transformations revealed tensions and struggles, as institutions were trying to make sense of working with "new" racial audiences in urban settings and dire economic situations. Urban agriculture played an important part in this effort, and as such, tells us a larger story about the changing nature of these institutions during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Growing Roots framed urban agriculture as an educational, interventionist tool to address urban poverty. This put the urban agriculture program front and center in an ongoing national debate on poverty and the role of government agencies vis-à-vis economic inequality. The discourse on poverty has of course been a contested field throughout the country's history. As we have seen, education — and especially agricultural education — has played a significant role within the negotiation of poverty relief. The idea of extension work is based on the premise that reaching into economically disadvantaged communities and educating people in fields like home economics and conducting skill and job training will enable these communities to "lift themselves up by their own bootstraps." Historically, notions of a self-reliant public empowered by the public service of educated elites contributed considerably to the foundation of American democracy and has, in the face of widespread economic inequality, been subject to fiercely contested debates. Welfare programs are better left to private, philanthropic endeavors and voluntary service, so the argument has often unfolded. Tensions between the size of government institutions and notions of individual liberty, often undergirded by moral panics about government dependence and the erosion of character, have deeply shaped American political culture, more specifically urban poverty. Thus, the implementation and development of *Growing Roots* not only provides us with insight into the historic development of urban agriculture in Detroit (and other large cities that participated). An examination of *Growing Roots* also reflects larger social and political debates on urban poverty. Changing zeitgeist and tensions arising in the public discourse (re-)shaped views on food aid and nutrition programs. When *Growing Roots* and *Farm-A-Lot* ended in 1992 and 1994 respectively, thousands of Detroiters had participated in these programs and cultivated countless fruit and vegetables for almost two decades. The practice had transformed the local relationship to its urban environment. In fact, urban agriculture had become so popular that citizens and activist circles took up the practice and started building networks outside the government-funded programs years before they ended.[11] Yet, urban poverty and food insecurity continued to red-

[11] Cf. Chapter V.

flag the deep economic and social crisis as large, structural countermeasures to poverty remain absent until today.

As a federal program, *Growing Roots*'s operations were well-documented. Unlike the *Farm-A-Lot* program, whose 20-year run in Detroit is scarcely documented in the local mayoral collection, *Growing Roots* was evaluated extensively and many of these evaluations remain preserved for the public in the National Archives and Record Administration, and the National Agricultural Library. The documentation provides insight into how the federal government enabled urban agriculture to become of significance in struggling cities across the U.S. in the 1970s. It also helps us understand how government agencies framed the *urban crisis* at the time. These technocratic documents reveal a convoluted narrative that we are still familiar with today, one that largely equates urban Blackness with poverty, crime, and social demise. As we saw previously, this equation glosses over the economic and social diversity of urban black communities. It clouds the structural and institutional mechanisms that have trapped many Blacks in poverty, and obscures the economic transformations that have led to the financial ruin of numerous city centers, which then became the structural prisons of generations of poor and predominantly (but not exclusively) black people. Expert knowledges and media depictions have been instrumental in the discursive production of misleading crisis narratives and the equally misleading political remedies against them. While this analysis is built largely on the documents that have informed these constructions, we must not forget the thousands of urban agriculture practitioners that have found pride and dignity in caring for their crops, often finding connections to their families' history and heritage through their engagement with these urban spaces. What challenges and tensions arose from the fact that a predominantly rural organization like 4-H was in charge of implementing and urban program? What role did race play in securing food? What implications did it have that the federal urban agriculture program was administered by a youth organization? To what extent was the government program complicit in the increasing neoliberalization of health, food security, and poverty discourses? These questions guide the following analysis of the federal urban agriculture program and direct us to first take a deeper look at the institutional history that so fundamentally shaped and informed its implementation.

1967, Rebellion

Scholars and media depictions often identify the violent events of 1967 as the advent of Detroit's urban crisis. On the evening of July 23, two black soldiers celebrated their safe return from Vietnam in a *blind pig*, an unauthorized bar. The bar was located on 12th Street in an area populated predominantly by blacks. Police raided the celebrations, which led to confrontations in the streets that quickly escalated. Eventually, President Lyndon B. Johnson sent in 4,700 troops to quash the turmoil. In the end, the riots lasted five days and cost 43 lives, most of whom were blacks gunned down by police and the National Guard. Some 500 were injured. Entire blocks burnt to the ground, resulting in damages of somewhere between $40 and $80 million.[12] Until the Watts Riots in 1992, the 12th Street rebellion would remain the most costly in American history.[13] These events remain the core reference point for scholarly and popular negotiations of Detroit's economic and social downturn. The following subchapter gives a short summary of the discourses, outlines why and how they are problematic, some even misleading, and reinterprets and historically re-situates the events. Taking a close look at the role of food security in urban inequality at the time, I argue that the root causes of the 1967 rebellion go beyond structural transformations and stem from everyday struggles of marginalized Detroiters that affected their basic needs.

On a national level, the 12th Street rebellion seemed to exemplify the escalating zeitgeist. The *long, hot summer of 1967*, as it became known, saw 159 such events in urban centers all across the US. While the rioting was still underway in Detroit, President Johnson installed the *Kerner Commission* to investigate the causes of and possible remedies for this climate of extreme social tension. The report that was published in March of the following year came to the conclusion that residential segregation, lack of economic opportunity for blacks, and the structural, institutional, and informal racism of a white-hegemonic society lay at the root of the problem. The Commission sharply attacked the ignorance and apathy of white America in the face of black inequality and called for widespread measures to counteract what they characterized as the nation "moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal."[14] President Johnson subsequently ignored the report. One month after its publication,

[12] Between $300m and $600m in current value, cf. "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount - 1790 to Present", Measuring Worth.com, https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/ (accessed 14 Jan, 2020).
[13] For a detailed account, cf. Sidney Fine, "Chapter 11: 'A Night of Horror and Murder,'" in Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Michigan State University Press, 2007)Violence, 271-290.
[14] United States. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the*

Reverend Martin Luther King was assassinated, sparking new violent outbreaks across urban America.

In Detroit, known at the time for its racial progressivism, the 12th Street riots produced diverse reactions. Local, white-owned media mirrored the ignorance regarding black inequality attested by the *Kerner* report. *The Detroit News*, one of two major daily newspapers, lamented:[15]

> Detroit enjoyed a national reputation for good community relations […]. Rapport existed between the city administration and the Negro community. Negroes held important posts in government, the unions, and were elected to every branch of government and the judiciary. The police department was praised for a trained, sensible handling of community tensions. Negro leaders were an articulate, reasoned voice in the forward movement of Detroit. There were no street demonstrations or the harsh outbreaks of other cities. […] There was every reason for optimism. Then the wave of social unrest sweeping the nation finally hit even Detroit.

Absent from this characterization of Detroit race relations were the long-fought and often bloody struggles that had been necessary for blacks to advance in economic and public life. The seminal study *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* highlights the decades of radical black union activism that was necessary to push for black employment opportunities in the industrial sector, which often enough only accomplished blacks gaining the most dangerous and worst paid positions on shop floors.[16] Poor communities of color especially suffered from the disproportional and uncensored violence employed by the Detroit Police Department. The force was only integrated in 1974. Furthermore, Detroit had seen several racially motivated violent outbreaks, most notably in 1943 and 1965, that seem to have slipped the editors' minds. In the 1950s, several efforts to build highways connecting the suburbs with downtown Detroit, led to the erasure of vibrant black communities in Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. Deeming them *ghettos* justified the concentration of poor blacks in public housing projects, which then became the focus of *black-ghetto* discourses for the subsequent decades. In the meantime, highways facilitated the relocation of the white middle class to the suburbs by making access to downtown workplaces fast and convenient. Left on the fringes once again were marginalized and economically disenfranchised blacks, who saw local schools and other vital infrastructure crumble as the city's tax base relocated and shrank. The demographic trend of the 1950s

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National Advisory Commission On Civil Disorders (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 1.

[15] *Detroit News*, Special Edition, 24 July, 1967.

[16] Cf. Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying. A Study in Urban Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1998, updated edition).

continued and by 1967, blacks comprised 40 percent of the population. As the suburbs expanded, blacks remained trapped in the city due to redlining. The segregation was especially noticeable in the area around 12th Street, which completely reversed its racial make-up within two decades.[17] Marsha Music, a Detroit artist, recalls perceiving the transformation as so sudden, it seemed her white childhood friends disappeared as if kidnapped.[18] This further highlights the distorted temporality that shaped the formation of Detroit's urban crisis.

By and large, popular media depicted the 1967 rebellion and its context as causally connected to white flight and consequently the further economic and social decline of the city. Readers got the impression that the riots were causes — rather than effects — of the economic decline of Detroit. This interpretation is especially problematic because it blatantly disregards that deindustrialization and suburbanization had been underway since the 1940s, and that these developments were embedded in the structural racism of various federal policies and local practices, causing immense frustration in many black Detroiters. Hence, the popular discourse on the rebellion of 1967 has tied Detroit's legacy as a *black city* causally to its economic and social downturn. This sentiment lingers today and has recently seen renewed popularity.[19]

Academic discourse has been busy contesting this common racial narrative of Detroit's decline. By and large, historians have focused on the larger economic developments,[20] the role of unions in negotiating their effects,[21] and the various forms of racism shaping Detroit's residential history.[22] These accounts have painted a grim picture of the *black experience* of living in Detroit ever since the *Great Migration*. Obviously, the focus on these larger structural developments served to contextualize the personal frustrations and trauma that had preceded and likely caused the violent eruption. However, the debate of the legacy of 1967 has divided historians. One scholarly argument interprets the events as a *rebellion* — an act of resistance against an authority or power structure — to effect long-term structural and political change.[23] The other side contends the events were rather "a spontaneous form of protest"[24] that was

[17] Cf. Fine, *Violence…,* 4; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis. Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 244.
[18] Marsha Music, "The Kidnapped Children of Detroit," in *A Detroit Anthology*, ed. Anna Clark (Detroit: Rust Belt Chic Press, 2014), 225-231.
[19] Cf. VI. Outlook for further information.
[20] Cf. Sugrue.
[21] Cf. Georgakas and Surkin; Cf. Heather-Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).
[22] Cf. June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013); Sugrue.
[23] Cf. James and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (Now York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 16.
[24] Fine, 359.

lacking comprehensive demands and, thus, exemplified a "riot" and a product of "a series of chance factors."[25] (In my research, I have studied numerous groups that reacted to 1967 to effect long-term change. While I have not encountered such efforts as among the causal origins of the *riot/rebellion*, they certainly sprang up afterwards. Keeping this in mind, I use the term rebellion.) Ultimately, as the argument continues, the rebellion only heightened the structural and social problems the city had already been facing. Certainly, the rebellion of 1967 served as a symbolic event that produced captivating images seemingly able to visually summarize a complex transformation affecting all Detroiters. Their historical negotiation justifiably focuses on the larger structural transformations underlying them. In many ways, this reflects the city leadership's efforts to engage with the urban crisis.

Indeed, a study conducted shortly thereafter found that supermarkets had been disproportionately targeted in the rebellion.[26] This suggested that grocery stores played a distinct role in exemplifying the effects of the crisis. Neither the local white liberal elite nor black organizers failed to realize the significance that lay in blacks struggling to make ends meet paying more for low-quality basic necessities. Outside these Detroit circles, however, a different perspective formed. The Michigan governor's commission tasked with investigating the rebellion simply concluded that the "recent influx of southern black migrants […] exhibited a propensity toward violence and lawlessness that the city's black leadership had actually encouraged by fanning unrealistic expectations of equal rights in the North."[27] Such verdicts enabled the state's leadership to forego genuine reactions, which opened up further space for radicalization.

As mentioned, Detroit had by no means been the only city to see such violent outbursts. Structural discrimination, systematic police violence, and everyday racism were rampant in urban centers across the United States. While the Civil Rights Movement brought legislative changes counteracting many aspects of systemic racism, the movement was deeply shaped by its southern origins. More radical and urban equivalents, thus, began to form in the mid-1960s. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was one of them. Founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California, in 1966,[28] it saw rapid expansion across the United

[25] Ibid., 367.
[26] A follow-up study on inner-city price inflation is detailed in: Jack Kresnak, *Hope for the City. A Catholic Priest, a Suburban Housewife and their Desperate Effort to Save Detroit* (Detroit: Cass Community Publishing House, 2015), 30-36.
[27] Ahmad A. Rahman, "Marching Blind: The Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Detroit," in eds. Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, *Liberated Territory. Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 181.
[28] It has been noted that prior to Newton's and Seale's BPP, an organization by the same name was founded in Harlem, NYC, in the summer of 1966. Cf. Yohuru Williams: "Introduction. From Oakland to Omaha:

States. As historian Yohuru Williams contended, this success lies in two factors. One was the codification of the BPP's ideas and agenda into a ten-point program that enabled replication; the second lay in its focus on community services like the "survival programs." As Williams explains, neither one had anything to do with the widely publicized military posturing and calls for armed self-defense of the black community that have shaped the public image of the BPP.[29] Tellingly, the community service program focused on black food security, health care services, and community policing, which can inform us about the needs and frustrations within urban Black communities prior to the *long, hot summer*. It included the well-known Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program as well as a Free Food Program intended "to supplement the groceries of Black and poor people until economic conditions allow them to purchase good food at reasonable prices."[30] The BPP's success and their focus on food security further highlight the dimension of grocery discrimination that was later affirmed by the aforementioned studies in the Detroit area. The city's BPP did reportedly implement these "survival programs" — however, due to intense scrutiny and subversion by the FBI, Detroit's chapter was relatively short-lived. As Ahmad A. Rahman details, a number of local leaders died under suspicious circumstances that were never cleared up.[31] Considering the role of food security in the 1967 rebellion further highlights the outrageous tragedy of the FBI's war against the BPP. As black self-determination and community organizing was faced with such violent, government opposition, it comes as no surprise that white liberals and progressives dominated food-centered reactions to the rebellion.

Father William Cunningham, a Detroit native, was already notorious for riding a motorcycle across the city. He was taking part in a priest seminar when the rebellion happened. Like many Detroiters, he was shocked by the violence that seemed to have taken ahold of his city. For him, the riots served as a warning sign and a call to action. And so he spent the days after the fact assembling parishioners and visiting the affected neighborhoods to talk to people familiar with the social environment that had produced the outbreak. Again and again he heard similar sentiments: "We're being ripped off in the supermarket, we're being taken advantage

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Historicizing the Panthers," in eds. Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, *Liberated Territory. Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 1.

[29] Cf. Yohuru Williams: "Introduction. From Oakland to Omaha: Historicizing the Panthers," in eds. Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, *Liberated Territory. Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 2.

[30] David Hilliard (Ed.). *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 35.

[31] Cf. Ahmad A. Rahman, "Marching Blind: The Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Detroit," in eds. Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, *Liberated Territory. Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 181-232.

of. We have to pay more for our groceries than they're paying anywhere else."[32] This caught Cunningham's attention and he started researching the role of grocery stores in the riots. He found supermarkets and corner stores had been disproportionally affected by the riots and decided to take action and organize. The result was a collaboration between the Catholic archdiocese, economists and sociologists at Detroit's Wayne State University, and leading non-profit organizations like New Detroit, Inc. to produce a comparative study on food prices in inner city and suburban Detroit. Reports paint an intriguing picture. White, Catholic housewives from the suburbs conducted the actual surveys by going undercover to buy groceries in areas they considered ghettos. The women prepared accordingly, for example by opting for open baskets instead of shopping bags, so as not to be suspected of shoplifting. The findings of the study shocked many of its conductors: on average, inner-city residents were charged up to 20 percent more than their suburban counterparts, service quality seemed to depend on the skin color of customers, hygienic standards and freshness of produce were lower than in the suburbs, and in some cases, white merchants even blatantly charged black customers more for the same products than white customers.[33]

The study left a somewhat short-lived mark on the local public discourse. But it did produce a political reaction that is characteristic of the efforts of Detroit's liberal leadership in reacting to the riots. Mayor Jerome Cavanagh responded to the media reports of food discrimination and initiated the *Task Force on Hunger and Malnutrition*. Its mission was to identify the root causes of these discrepancies in pricing. Once again, looking at the big picture was conflated with finding solutions. The task force found that new business models in the food retail industry had dramatically changed the sector and demanded ever-larger supermarkets. The contemporary maxim foresaw that the larger the area size of a supermarket, the larger the profits. In spite of Detroit's economic crisis, such large spaces were simply unavailable at the desired cost. Large stores who could afford to attract customers with low prices subsequently moved to the expanding suburbs, and had all but deserted inner-city Detroit by the late 1960s. In their stead remained small, independent, and mostly family-operated businesses that compensated for the higher prices they paid by passing them on to their customers.[34] Having successfully identified the dictate of maximizing profits as the root cause of food discrimination obviously posed a problem for the white liberal elite. How were they to

[32] *McNichols Road – University of Detroit Mercy Student Magazine* (Vol. III, No. 2, Spring 1995), 26.
[33] Cf. Kresnak, 30-36.
[34] Cf. "Shoppers in Inner City Do Pay More – And Here's Why" *Detroit Free Press*, 5 Sept., 1968; Cf. "Do Low Income Families Pay More for Food?" *Michigan Catholic*, 4 Apr., 1968.

tackle the predominant dogma of capitalism? To them there could only be one solution: subsidies for inner-city grocery stores. Perhaps it is needless to say that this never materialized.

The man who had inspired the efforts, Father Cunningham, continued his activism and founded *Focus: HOPE*, a non-profit that started what became the nation's largest supplemental food and nutrition program for pregnant women and mothers of small children. In their statistics, *Focus: HOPE* staff was able to document a hunger crisis that never went away. Regular economic crises heightened the issue, leading to a seemingly never-ending sequence of precarity and dependence. Today, some 42 percent of Detroit's population receive some form of food aid, most of it provided through SNAP.[35] Ultimately, Detroit's political leadership failed in negotiating the effects of the urban crisis because they kept offering individualized reactions to systemic problems. Perhaps their efforts were futile from the beginning.

The 1969 mayoral elections saw white law-and-order conservative Roman Gribbs installed at city hall. Crime — especially robberies — escalated during his term. True to his platform Gribbs installed an undercover police unit called *Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets* (*S.T.R.E.S.S.).* In its three-and-a-half-year tenure, the unit became notorious for entrapping and violently assaulting young black men. One officer alone, Raymond Peterson, shot and killed six men and wounded five more. In total, 24 people were killed by the unit, 22 of whom were black. With this obvious racial bias and use of excessive force, *S.T.R.E.S.S.* affected the political climate in the city. A survey found "an increase in Black feelings of distrust toward Whites, rejection of contact with Whites, and endorsement of violence as perhaps the only way to gain equal rights."[36] While the first mayoral election after the riots had been "characterized by moderation,"[37] the following election cycle erupted into bitter race-baiting – unsurprisingly, since police chief John Nichols, who was overseeing *S.T.R.E.S.S.*, was one of the candidates. His opponent was the black State Senator and union activist Coleman Young, Jr. By 1973, white flight had driven out enough of Nichols's potential voters and Young took the race.[38] With Coleman Young's election, the path was cleared for the next major chapter in Detroit's agricultural history. A 20-year tenure as mayor provided longevity to his urban farming program. However, in light of rampant poverty and a systemic lack of jobs in the city,

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[35] Cf. Statistical Atlas, "Food Stamps in Detroit, Michigan," online: https://statisticalatlas.com/place/Michigan/Detroit/Food-Stamps (accessed Jan 14, 2020).
[36] Focus: HOPE "Hunger Task Force", "A Note on Changes in Black Racial Attitudes in Detroit, 1968-1976" in Focus: HOPE Collection (Box 7, Folder 26), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[37] John O'Loughlin and Dale A. Berg, "The Election of Black Mayors, 1969 and 1973," *Annals of American Geographers* 67, No. 2 (1977), 226.
[38] Ibid., 237.

one cannot but wonder: could small clusters of gardens and farms in what would soon be endless seas of green carry more than symbolic significance? To answer to this question, I conduct an in-depth analysis of Detroit's urban agriculture programs.

By the time Detroit elected its first black mayor in 1973, the physical wounds of 1967 had long been closed and brushed over with an array of new buildings up and around 12th Street, the epicenter of the rebellion. Naturally, the economic and social downturn was still ongoing. While the white liberal and progressive elite turned to a number of symbolic initiatives to deescalate racial tension, the majority of blacks continued to be marginalized and disempowered in their social and geographical mobility. Except for a small wealthy group, blacks remained trapped in a deteriorating city. In social reality, and political rhetoric, racial polarization had spread.

Beginnings

In the early 1970s, William Mills, a teacher and resident in Detroit's east side neighborhood noticed changes in his community. Street fighting and violent interruptions at schools became more common. Neighbors complained to him about youth breaking into homes and robbing people in the streets. It seemed young people were starting to organize themselves in gangs, looking to stake out and claim territories across the area. A local high school had recently closed due to the deteriorating economic situation of the city, handing a rather dilapidated building and recreation center over to fate. To Mills, the progressing decay offered an opportunity. In spring of 1972, he began to organize with friends and neighbors to reclaim the space and turn it into a community center. One youth gang that had declared the area its turf, rejected this transformation. Past experiences and social conflict with school and church staff, as well as the feeling of being excluded from a territory they claimed as their own, fueled their fight against the community program. Over the course of six months, members vandalized the building and harassed volunteer organizers, determined to get revenge for the invasion of their space. In the fall, Mills approached the Wayne County Extension Office for help and together they began to develop a special program to actively involve local youth in the community center. Volunteer staff engaged with members who showed only moderate interest in the activities of the gang but went along with it for the sake of experiencing fellowship and exertion. Over the course of several months, trust began to form and some teens shifted their

priorities in group activities and became increasingly involved with the center.[39]

In summer of 1973, Mills left his teaching job to become a full-time 4-H Youth Agent. Through volunteer work as well as the support of the organization, the community center, now named the McClellan Center (after the street it was located on), evolved to house diverse facilities that catered to the interests and needs of both youth and adult members of the community. A gym, locker rooms with showers, a balcony for crafts and woodworking, a kitchen, a basement for community meetings, office areas, and a playground became popular meeting spots. The major activities offered to youth reflected the involvement of 4-H in their traditional focus on gendered home-making and physical activities. In sewing and knitting workshops, local girls learned to make their own clothing, which they displayed in fashion shows. Team sports activities also reflected a binary divide, with boys engaging in basketball and football games, and girls playing softball. However, there were also new activities that 4-H offered, which reflected the urban nature of the center's setting. Youth learned to defend themselves in karate classes, which reflects the insecure and volatile environment of the area. Furthermore, many team sports activities were led by local (and male) police officer volunteers, highlighting the efforts to improve the notoriously distrustful community-police relationship present in many black neighborhoods in the city. At the same time, this demonstrates that the 4-H-led community center also became an agent for local government interests. Other recreational activities for youth included dance and drama workshops, field trips, and nutrition education. 4-H also shaped the community center by driving the formation of networks with other organized groups in the area. In addition to the Police Athletic League, several churches and schools, as well as the organization City Bus Drivers, got involved in the local activities. These networks also facilitated the creation of two additional smaller satellite centers nearby. A monthly newsletter informed interested participants about upcoming events. Within the first three years of the center's existence, approximately 2,500 youth under the supervision of countless volunteers engaged with these new, urban 4-H programs.[40]

In 1977, the McClellan Center became the heart of urban agriculture in Detroit. Earlier in the year, Congress had approved a federal urban gardening program and determined that extension agents were to use this program to "develop and improve urban gardening for food production, preservation and utilization to result in improved nutrition for low-income urban

[39] Cf. Ralph Abbott et. al., "Process & Impact Evaluation, The Detroit 4-H Program," final report, (East Lansing: Michigan State University, Oct 1976) Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.
[40] Ibid.

families, including youth."[41] Organizationally, the program was part of the Cooperative Extension Service's *Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program* (EFNEP), which originated in the Lyndon B. Johnson Administration's *War on Poverty* initiative.[42] This shows that the federal urban agriculture initiative was devised to intervene in urban poverty and aimed to do so by using urban gardening as a nutrition education tool. While food aid had by and large consisted of distributing commercially overproduced foodstuffs to low-income people, the urban gardening program now signified the "increased emphasis [that was] being placed on home gardening as part of the EFNEP and 4-H programs as a means of increasing home production of food and improving the nutritional level of family diets."[43] This institutional perspective demonstrates the effort to shift responsibility for urban hunger issues away from the government and into the hands of those individuals suffering from it, an issue I explore later.

Initially, Congress approved $1.5 million in funds for the six cities that participated in the inaugural year,[44] which was expanded to $3 million and 16 cities in total in the following year.[45] The administration of the program was assigned to 4-H, as the agency was in the process of developing the appropriate facilities, staff, and networks in urban areas and set the focus of this agenda on the same target audience that the federal urban gardening program was devised to cater to. For 4-H, the task of implementing this new program went hand in hand with the larger challenges of making sense of this new urban environment, an issue the organization had been struggling with for a decade at this point. Engagement with crop cultivation had, after all, shaped large portions of its rural programming ever since it began, and now urban gardening offered an opportunity to use familiar techniques in conducting youth work. The new urban agriculture initiative also shaped the way 4-H, as well as the larger Cooperative Extension Service, made sense of urban space. Within this effort, the McClellan Center was just one step on a much larger path toward the urbanization of the agency but for local residents, the center would provide access to urban crop cultivation materials for many years to come. As we can see, the federal urban agriculture program provided different meanings for different actors. The same holds true, when we look at the municipal *Farm-A-Lot* program, and its charismatic proponent Coleman Young.

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[41] "4-H Expansion…1973-1978."
[42] Cf. Hadwiger, 21f.
[43] "4-H Expansion…1973-1978."
[44] The funding was split, with NYC receiving $500,000, Chicago $300,000, L.A. $250,000, and Detroit, Houston, and Philadelphia $150,000.
[45] Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland, Jacksonville, Memphis, Milwaukee, Newark/NJ, New Orleans, and St Louis were added.

Coleman Young: Passionate Industrialist, Reluctant Farmer

Coleman Young's election in late 1973 symbolized a political shift of historical proportions. For the first time in the city's history, a black union activist and former autoworker led the city administration. Born in 1918 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, he had come to the city as a child of the Great Migration with his parents in 1923. Growing up in the Black Bottom neighborhood revealed to Young the multi-faceted, rich, and often illegal aspects of the black community's segregated, yet relatively autonomous, experience. Young also encountered racism; it affected his educational and professional opportunities, and ultimately motivated his labor activism and political career. Known to be a charismatic, straight-shooting, and ambitious man, he rooted his politics in populism and close ties to industrial elites — these aspects would shape his twenty-year mayoral reign, but also inspire frequent, often defamatory criticism and discord.

Indeed, when Young was elected, a number of core voter groups were skeptical of him. His turn to urban agriculture displayed political savvy, as the practice offered up a host of different messages to address and correct the skepticism:

- Promoting urban agriculture aided the industry-friendly Young. By implementing an urban agriculture program, he could demonstrate to black civil rights activists that he related to and supported the cultural values of black Detroiters.

- Urban agriculture also offered a platform to address the racial inequality inherent in Detroit's urban crisis outside the hegemonial discourse on black, inner-city crime.

- Using *Farm-A-Lot* to address food insecurity granted Young flexibility in negotiating urban poverty. For whites, he could frame the practice in conservative terms of supporting self-help instead of dependence on government-sponsored food-aid programs. For blacks, he framed it as community self-help and resilience, the precursors of food justice.

- Simply referring to *Farm-A-Lot* as urban gardening enabled code-switching as gardening historically represented the white, middle-class ideal of domesticity.[46] Promoting it offered Young the chance to counteract white fears that the city was being taken over by Blacks.

- Young aimed to position himself as the political heir to Hazen S. Pingree,[47] the most popular mayor in Detroit history. Tapping into Pingree's political capital served to legitimize Young as a progressive reformer, granting him the political prestige needed to appeal to progressive and liberal elites who minded his bluntness and vulgarity.

[46] Cf. Chapter III.
[47] Cf. Chapter II.

- As mentioned, *Farm-A-Lot* was also Young's attempt at a real-estate scheme to get rid of costly lots — although sources do not confirm it was very successful.

It does seem that Young had problems relating personally to his program. Referencing *Ford Farms*,[48] Young did not hide his displeasure about what he seems to have perceived as coercive gardening: "Henry Ford the First, in his benevolent despotism, required that anybody who had a job at Ford would cultivate a Ford lot. That was the first time ... and the last … that I ever farmed."[49] His pitiful attempts at advertising Detroit soil as "enriched by all sorts of dirt" is testament to that.

Planning a New Urban Ecology

In his first year in office, Young tasked city employee Ann Beser with developing an urban agriculture program. Its name, *Farm-A-Lot*, is noteworthy. For one, it avoids the term gardening and instead references farming, hinting at black farming traditions and surely touching the pride and historical awareness of some members of the black community. The name also indicates one of the program's primary objectives: to deal with the growing problem of empty, city-owned lots. Apart from being unpleasant to look at, these spaces carry with them the double burden of not generating income in the form of property taxes, while requiring regular maintenance. Overgrown properties provide visual barriers that generate safe spaces for a host of criminal activity. This obviously creates ripple effects for surrounding communities. In the early 1970s, state of the art research suggested "such activity could be prevented through urban design that provided residents with patches of territory over which they felt some ownership and sense of responsibility, enabling them to be agents in ensuring their own safety."[50] *Farm-A-Lot* facilitated this and provided at least some relief for stretched city coffers even though selling city-owned lots off — as has more recently been practiced with excessive success — proved difficult. In this respect, the problem was that, once a farming permit had been acquired at city hall, the property was basically one's own for the remainder of the year. Buying such a lot would have only signified a regular, long-term tax commitment.

[48] Cf. Chapter III.
[49] Stephen Cain, "Young, no farmer, urges gardens," *Detroit News*, April 26, 1977.
[50] Jane M. Jacobs and Loretta Lees, "Defensible Space on the Move: Revisiting the Urban Geography of Alice Coleman," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37: No. 5 (2013), 1566.

If urban farming had been envisioned as a business opportunity at the time, this might have been different. But for the time being, *Farm-A-Lot* negotiated the primary objective of government-sponsored urban agriculture along the lines of urban crisis and (a non-Harveyan) *spatial fixing*.[51]

However, the nature of these spatial fixes went beyond the economic logic of the time in perhaps surprising ways. The team Ann Beser assembled in her quest to develop *Farm-A-Lot* looked to a broad range of advisers. Among them were environmental activists from the *San Francisco Ecology Center* and *Friends of the Earth*, who convinced the program planners to employ organic crop cultivating techniques instead of maximizing yields through chemical fertilizers and pesticides.[52] This had the effect that *Farm-A-Lot* incentivized alternatives to industrial farming practices that rely heavily on the use of petrol-based chemicals. In this way, the program managed to circumvent additional costs but also supported the reproduction of these early organic agricultural practices that many participants knew from previous agricultural experiences.

Farm-A-Lot's inaugural season was split into three phases. During the initial phase, the program handed out farming permits, assigned lots to participants, and equipped them with planning materials for the growing season. The newsletter *Farm-A-Lot News – News for the Urban Farmer* first came out in April 1975 and subsequently supplied participants with information on crop cultivation as well as community events centered around urban agriculture. The first edition, for example, features detailed instructions for planning and planting vegetable plots, outlining average planting distances for different popular vegetables. Next to basic cultivation knowledge, *Farm-A-Lot* also equipped its participants with seed packages and offered a tool-lending service.[53] In the second phase of the season, the growing season, the newsletter's focus shifts to common issues of plant cultivation: pest and weed control, and maximizing yields. In lieu of chemical fertilizers, the newsletters outline environmentally friendly management techniques like thinning out rows in order to increase yields. The third and final phase of the season concentrates on harvesting and preserving crops. Again, the

[51] You may note that I have blatantly changed the meaning of David Harvey's term *spatial fix*. Harvey contends that when capitalist actors have drained space of its financial value, new spaces inevitably need to be found, occupied, and turned into capital. To him, this moving on to new spaces signifies a *spatial fix*. I re-appropriate his term to highlight the parallels *and* differences of urban spatial re-negotiation during austerity within a racialized crisis discourse. Cf. David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital. Towards a Critical Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[52] Cf. correspondence with *San Francisco Ecology Center* and *Friends of the Earth,* in: Coleman Young Collection, Box 46, Folder 11, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

[53] Cf. Ann R. Beser, "Farm-A-Lot Progress Report," 6 June, 1975. In: Coleman Young Collection, Box 46, Folder 11, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

newsletter played an important role in educating participants. Harvesting methods and determining the ripeness of crops feature chiefly. During this time of the year, nutritionists from the *Cooperative Extension Service* regularly gave workshops on food preservation and canning at the local neighborhood city halls that distributed the *Farm-A-Lot* materials. The season was eclipsed by a blue ribbon contest at the *Michigan State Fair* where the *Farm-A-Lot* program even gained its own category.[54] These symbolic festivities served to affirm farming as a practice that could be pursued in urban spaces, counteracting the role farming has often played in the ontological separation of urban and rural space.

Overall, the planning of *Farm-A-Lot* promoted a culture of the planned management of otherwise barren urban land. However, the planning team around Beser created opportunities for participants to go beyond this stiff administrative framework. In the context of Detroit's urban crisis, empty city-owned lots represented more than just a local city administration's dire financial situation. They materialized financial and criminological threats in their appearance and ecology, providing visual barriers, and sending ripple effects far beyond their own boundaries. *Farm-A-Lot* countered these products of human administrative neglect with a seasonal plan of spatial fixing. The inclusion of crops rooted in black foodways and the creation of a sense of stewardship opened up diverse pathways for cultural and ecological production that goes beyond what the program intended.

Like the municipal program, the federal *Growing Roots* program relied on planned and controlled crop cultivation schemes that featured limited varieties of vegetables that were distributed to participants. On a larger level, the approach to ecologically reforming urban space was intertwined with the institutional interests and mechanisms governing 4-H, the agency that administered *Growing Roots*. For 4-H, the move into urban areas posed considerable challenges as far as the programs that were to be offered were concerned. As they had originally been developed in rural areas, the programs were designed to serve communities that lived in less-densely populated areas and focused on rural lifestyles of girls and boys. Some of the experts advising 4-H in their effort to urbanize made influential arguments that 4-H programs should treat urban spaces the way they had approached rural ones. Sociologist James S. Coleman argued in his lecture delivered at the 4-H State Leaders' Conference in 1979 that "[t]he principle that ought to be observed is simple: Import insofar as possible the activities developed in agricultural settings into urban areas, rather than attempting to find uniquely

[54] Ibid.

urban activities that are comparable to the rural ones."[55] The major aim in his argument was to save costs for the agency and speed up the process of transition. Developing new programs, within the framework of the CES, would have required substantial studies assessing and analyzing specifically urban needs. Instead, the approach of simply urbanizing rural programs, translating them spatially into urban settings was given preference, which provided cost-effectiveness and speed, and facilitated the transition proceeding with relatively minor transformations within the institutions.

The urbanization of the Extension Service in Detroit did come with substantial financial investments that would shape how urban agriculture was promoted and practiced in the federal program. In 1977, Wayne County managed to "obtain funding in the form of a 4.7 million dollar grant […] for the establishment of an Extension Center."[56] A 26-acre site that was granted to the Extension Service by the county would become home to a *Farm Park*. Here, the concept of a demonstration farm that the Extension Service as well as 4-H often used in rural youth programs was adapted to an urban setting. The spatial re-conception of a farm space is urbanized by integrating it into the particularly urban spatial form of a park. Instead of a barn, *Farm Park* featured an administration and conference center. Where a rural farm featured spaces for animal husbandry, in the urban setting these were effectively replaced with spaces for human organizational activity. In adherence with urban zoning laws, farm animals largely disappeared in this particular farm space. Surrounding built structures, a variety of different crop production sites were put in place. A crop trial space served to investigate the local micro-climate and soil conditions through experiments with different plants. In this way, the adaptivity of plants to the urban environment replicated similar efforts in rural 4-H clubs and extension sites. The sources also state that the demonstration area was intended to attract "commercial farmers in the area," signaling an effort to mix rural and urban clientele.[57] The demonstration area for crop production served to display methods like correct spacing, mulching, and plant combinations for teaching sessions and workshops. Here, participants were shown various methods of planting, pruning, and harvesting that would ensure plentiful yields. Through the expertise of expansion agents, *Farm Park* reproduced the technocratic idea of efficient crop production in an urban setting. Extension agents also replicated smaller

[55] James S. Coleman, "Urban Youth Development Study 1979," Kellogg Lecture delivered at 4-H State Leaders' Conference (Washington, DC, 1979).
[56] CES, MI, "Plan of Work, Michigan, 1976-77" internal report (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1982) Records of the Extension Service, Plans of Work 1975-1984, Box 22, National Archives and Records Administration.
[57] Ibid.

demonstration gardens in various parts of the city, which "provided residents with a visual image of what a *successful* garden would be like in their community."[58]

A separate *home horticulture garden* served to "demonstrate various types of horticulture plantings suitable for area home grounds. Including shrubs, trees, grass, ground covers, fruits, vegetables, flowers, green belt plantings, hedges, landscape combinations, etc."[59] While the guidelines for the urban gardening program repeatedly stated the goal of increasing home vegetable production, this shows that beautification also played a role in the federal urban gardening program. Participants learned to counteract the visibility of urban decay through flower and shrub cultivation, somewhat relieving the local administration of its responsibility of upkeeping empty spaces. From an institutional perspective, the engagement of citizens in these practices exemplifies the onset of neoliberal transformation; however, on an individual level these practices also served to re-connect people to an environment that had become unsafe and alienating for many. Overall, Detroit's *Farm Park* was an educational space where extension agents worked to spread their expertise. Merging the ideas of a farm and an urban park transformed the idea of urban recreational spaces into spaces where government agents educated individual citizens in the art of intervening in the urban crisis by planting crops, flowers, and other plants. Meandering pathways through carefully managed displays of trees, green spaces, and other plant life rarely associated with human consumption dissipate and raised beds, carefully planned rows of edible greens appear. The impression of an immersion in *nature* is replaced by the immersion in farm spaces that suggest a restored and reformed urbanity through its visual referencing of rurality. The reduction of farm activities served the adherence to urban zoning laws, while propagating to the public the presence of rural activity, more specifically of farm life.

Whereas one success of city parks lies in imitating the idea of wilderness and thus offering escape in an urban setting, *Farm Park* translated this idea into an imitation of rurality. The idea of *nature* is negotiated in interesting ways here. It should be noted that the abstract idea of what *nature* might be is traditionally constructed as existing apart from, if not in opposition to, human activity and human life.[60] In this respect is seems particularly contradictory that spaces for crop production — spaces that ideally feature only organisms that are put in place by human actors and are carefully managed and maintained in this way through

[58] My emphasis, Abbott: "Growing Roots Abstract".
[59] CES, MI, "Plan of Work…1976-77."
[60] Cf. Timothy Morton. *Ecology Without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 7.

a host of time- and labor-intensive practices that aim to fulfill as efficiently as possible the intended outcome of such activity — would become spearheads of an urban *back to nature* movement. But as the CES notes in its Plan of Work, "[t]he 'back to nature' movement, allied with a general interest in good health among youth and adults, are other reasons for increased interest in [urban crop production]."[61] This notion suggests that the idea of nature at this time and in this specific place was re-conceptualized to fit the urban setting as it was undergoing the larger socio-economic transformation that produced the urban crisis. Aiming to "[i]mprove [the] viability of neighborhoods and quality of living through awareness of horticultural improvement programs,"[62] to use the bureaucratic language of the extension reports, ultimately signified a reformist approach to urban areas that was aiming to implement values and practices that the same agency had previously used to transform rural communities across the country.

Philanthropic Dependence

As we saw above, the federal Growing Roots program operated on public funds and — although funding had to be renewed annually by congress — obtained some financial stability. The opposite was the case with the municipal program. If *Farm-A-Lot* had in some way been intended as an actual food aid program, the dependence discourse that commonly breaks out in the field of welfare politics would have been quite different. This is the first thought that comes to my mind when considering the funding situation of the program: Initially, *Farm-A-Lot* effectively did not have any funding. The program created no new jobs and merely increased the workload of employees in local offices all over the city, producing the result that a government program was fundamentally dependent on donations. Obviously, this signified severe structural limitations and raises questions as to the actual value placed on *Farm-A-Lot* by its initiator, Coleman Young. How was the program was running at all?

The answer lies in the efforts of municipal employees. Program director Ann Beser and her team managed to generate enough donations to enable the farming of 500 lots in the first year of operations. One Detroit garden center donated seeds, equipment, and even a garden hotline offering free consultations. However, farming urban land is not merely a matter of tossing seeds in the air and waiting to see what happens. Usually, empty city-owned properties

[61] CES, MI, "Plan of Work…1979-80."
[62] Ibid.

are overgrown with vegetation. Underground, soil is often condensed and hard to break. Hence, it was a fortunate gift when a local farm equipment dealer donated several tractors to *Farm-A-Lot*.[63] As records show, the quality of the soil on some properties required extra nutritional care. Again, local resources, this time in the form of the *Department of Parks and Recreation* and the Detroit Zoo, offered wood chips, leaves, ash, and dung that facilitated soil remediation. Improvisation and cooperation played a vital role in the functioning of Farm-A-Lot. However, Beser saw that in the long run this structure offered too little planning security and regular challenges needed to be overcome. So she set out to apply for federal funding, this time looking to collaborate with the *Cooperative Extension Service*.[64]

Mayor Young supported the program's financial situation by drying up some potential sources for expenses. For example, he instructed the *Water* and *Fire Departments* to enable free access to water via fire hydrants. In later years of the program, Young attracted a number of large donations from corporate elites in the city. In 1983, the Ford Motor Co., Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. and Chrysler Co. were *Farm-A-Lot*'s largest donors. Overall, the companies contributed several tractors, rototillers, tools, seeds, and a number of farming services that were ceremonially handed over to mayor Young during annual harvest festivals.[65] Belle Isle, home of Detroit's historic rowing clubs and zoo, became the appropriate stage for these events, allowing brief contact between the two ends of the economic spectrum.

Farm-A-Lot, in this way, not only offered up space to citizens for food cultivation. It also generated a platform for generous philanthropists like Henry Ford 2nd to donate crumbs of their wealth in front of the eyes of the public for their own benefit. Their gestures served to fill the void a financially distressed and retreating government had created. Taking into consideration that the Young administration conspicuously pursued industry-oriented policies (often enough featuring generous tax-payer-funded subsidies) throughout his 20-year reign, one may also come to the conclusion that *Farm-A-Lot*'s dire funding situation mirrored Detroit's larger economic power structures.

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[63] Cf. Barbara Young, "Corn stalks to offer hope to trashy area," *Detroit News*, May 10, 1979.
[64] Cf. Ann R. Beser and Coleman Young, "Farm-A-Lot Initial Site Development Proposal", 3 Oct 1975. In: Coleman Young Collection,, Box 46, Folder 11; Ann R. Beser and Coleman Young, "Farm-A-Lot Progress Report," 6 June, 1975. In: Coleman Young Collection, Box 46, Folder 11, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
[65] „Firms boost city Farm-a-Lot program," *Detroit News*, May 7, 1983.

"Helping People Do for Themselves:" Managing Socio-Economic Change

Just as agriculture has grown from the nearly self-sufficient farmer to a complex of interrelated occupations, CES has changed from an educational service primarily for rural people to one that reaches both rural and urban sectors. It has multiplied educational opportunity through thousands of volunteer leaders one of the major strengths of the Extension Service organization. It has embraced a credo which Abraham Lincoln once said, "You cannot help people permanently by doing for them, what they could and should do for themselves."[66]
Gordon E. Guyer

Michigan Cooperative Extension Service director Gordon E. Guyer was clearly excited about the direction his organization was taking when he wrote these lines to extension services all across the Great Lakes state in the early 1980s. To him, the agency had successfully met the challenge of urbanization and had done so following the tradition of the great emancipator. Yet, what he framed as a great success story for his organization found its significance in different realms. For one, Abraham Lincoln never said these words. They originated from William J.H. Boetcker, a German-born Presbyterian minister and outspoken conservative, who gained notoriety at the turn of the century as an opponent of organized labor. A leaflet called "Lincoln on Private Property" that Boetcker printed in 1916 paired his own quotes with some actual Lincoln quotes. The different ascriptions were lost in subsequent reprints, giving rise to this misattribution.[67] However, the invocation of this quote tells us several things about the Extension Service. One is about the foundational philosophy at the heart of the agency, which stands in the historically republican-democratic approach to education in the United States. The notion of involving locals in government-led educational efforts through active participation still persisted in the early 1970s. The Extension Service frequently highlighted that its "role is not to do for people but to help people do for themselves."[68] This sentiment does bear a resemblance to the wannabe Lincoln quote that was evoked ten years later, in that it interprets the role of government as limited by highlighting individual responsibility as a central concept. However, how it evokes this sentiment is quite different. Guyer's reference used "could and should do for themselves" in an authoritative way that implies a degree of punishment, while "help people do for themselves" implies a benevolent, if limited, government that aims to

[66] CES, MI, "Plan of Work…1981-82."
[67] Cf. Edward Steers, Jr., *Lincoln Legends: Myths, Hoaxes, and Confabulations Associated with Our Greatest President.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 91f. Ronald Reagan most notably invoked the misattribution in his speech at the 1992 Republican convention.
[68] National 4-H Volunteer Leadership Development Committee, "Why Volunteers? A Philosophy," Report, Extension Service, USDA (Washington, D.C.: 1973) Records and Studies Pertaining to 4-H, Box 38, Entry 64, National Archives and Record Administration.

alleviate people's difficulties by supporting their own abilities. This leads us to another dimension that these quotes reveal, and it is one about how Guyer used tradition to mask a specific zeitgeist. While the notion of "helping" already implies a limited conception of government welfare, the government now signals its forceful withdrawal from public life. Beyond shifting its tasks and obligations over to private citizens and philanthropic organizations, the age of *Reaganomics* that underlies this change centralized an understanding of government welfare as a negative notion that contradicts the role of government and American values. Both notions follow the (supposedly) Jeffersonian credo that "that government is best which governs least" and, thus, both form a philosophical continuity to American political tradition.

However, if we recall Michel Foucault's concept of *governmentality*, we might actually reach the opposite conclusion. Foucault argued that liberal democracies construct an intricate value-based system of governance that construct a frame for what is acceptable, normal, and valuable, and what is not. Citizens internalize these values and reproduce them, thus governing themselves and others, without reflecting on this as intentional, restrictive, or guiding their actions.[69] From this Foucauldian perspective, the two quotes on the work of the Extension Service reveal its highly contradictory nature. Politically and historically, they stand for varying degrees of government withdrawal and responsibilization. As is generally accepted, the 1970s reined in this neoliberal transformation, which then accelerated during the Reagan years. Simultaneously, they show how the material withdrawal of government went hand in hand with a growing internalization of a specific value system. While at first the retreat of the government was accompanied by notions of "helping people do for themselves," this later turned into an admonishing, almost threatening "could and should," reminding those who engaged with extension services and agents of their present or looming failure to be "responsible." Detroit's[70] urban agriculture programs demonstrate this transformation into the neoliberal era well. Taking a closer look at the engagement of poor people in food aid programs like the municipal and federal urban gardening initiatives reveals the changes in philosophical as well as material notions of work. This becomes especially striking in a city like Detroit, that had once risen to the top of the urban American food chain through its industrial productivity. As we saw earlier, this heyday had once seemed to promise better futures for many southern

[69] Michel Foucault, Ewald, F. Senellart, and A. Fontana, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[70] Sociologist Stephan Lessenich's work on responsibilization and externalization would further underline this point. Cf. Stephan Lessenich, *Neben und die Sintflut. Die Externalisierungsgesellschaft und ihr Preis* (Berlin: Hanser Verlag, 2016).

Blacks and spurred the Great Migration. In the 1970s, this promise had become empty and void for many African Americans who were now trapped in poverty and a decaying urban environment. The story of neoliberal transformation is deeply rooted in intersectionality; it interweaves class and race even further than the urban crisis of the 1950s and 1960s had. While it is important to show these distressing structural and institutional mechanisms, we must also remember the dignity and pride that many Detroit Blacks found in their urban gardens that enabled them to connect to the skills and lives of their ancestors and create places of community and heritage within this often hostile urban environment.

The federal urban agriculture program constituted a government-led social reform effort to intervene in the racialized notion of the urban crisis. Interestingly, although suburbanization and deindustrialization were clearly the structural root causes of this development, they did not constitute a crisis in the eyes of the government and hence did not warrant an intervention. And why should they? After all, the suburbs were thriving and growing, families were doing well and so was the suburban economy. While some auto plants had migrated to states with lower union activity — many of them to the south, furthering local interests in job "creation" there — the suburbs surrounding Detroit had also attracted a large piece of the pie. Within Detroit's city lines, as in many U.S. cities that saw similar economic developments, social tensions grew as police violence, crime, and hunger spread. Starting even before 1973, and then certainly accelerating through the Oil Crises, food costs skyrocketed in the 1970s.[71] The urban revolts of the late 1960s lingered in the minds of political actors in Washington, while more radical black organizations seemed to threaten white hegemony with their calls for black power, with the growing number of black mayors seemingly confirming this development. Unemployment, crime, and hunger threatened the precarious stability of the urban social order, and welfare programs could barely contain the tensions, let alone coast over the urban social and environmental decay. The massive transformation of the economy would certainly not be reversed and jobs that could sustain the growing urban underclass were nowhere near in sight. As the Extension Service was reframing urban and black poverty, the national conversation on welfare was shifting increasingly toward framing welfare in terms of dependency.[72] The

[71] The reasons for this were manifold. By the early 1970s, the US dollar had become severely overvalued, effectively putting a tax on exports, which companies tried to make up for by increasing domestic prices. The Nixon Administration devalued the dollar in 1971 but poor harvests in the Soviet Union and a drought in South Asia led to a decline in wheat production in 1972, which led to a price increase. In late 1973 and early 1974, OPEC quadrupled the price of petroleum, significantly increasing the costs of agricultural production that led to further increasing food costs. Cf. Vernon W. Ruttan (Ed.). *Why Food Aid?* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993, 21f.

[72] Nadasen et. al. comment on this: "By the 1980s, a new group of conservative scholars in corporate-funded think-tanks employed these concerns to attack AFDC. In their hands, longstanding criticisms of welfare grew

Extension Service, with its reliance on volunteer labor and its seemingly empowering approach to work ("help people do for themselves"), was well-equipped to move into the gap that was opening up between the needs of urban black and poor people and the growing reluctance of politicians to provide aid, let alone their incapability to tackle the larger economic issues at heart.

When Congress enacted the urban agriculture program *Growing Roots*, the expressed intent specifically aimed at two things: facilitating the reduction of food costs and improving health. Neither one actually addressed the root causes of economic disadvantage and instead reacted to the symptoms of racially segregated poverty. While there is an obvious mismatch between the extent of urban poverty and the federal urban agriculture program, it did offer a way to coast over some of the effects in ways that adhered to the managerial, technocratic logic of the political leadership who green-lit it. The first objective — saving money — provided an easy way for the Extension Service to measure the program's success. The agency ascertained from a number of participants how much produce they harvested over the course of the season, calculated the average, and came up with an estimate of the total value that the gardens and their laborers had produced. This could then be compared to the market value of these crops, with the conclusion being that the low-income participants "saved" a specific dollar amount through their urban agricultural production. Of course, there is an argument to be made that this model is speculative, because it assumes that these urban gardeners would have consumed the same amount of vegetables, salads, legumes etc. if they had not participated in the program. Considering the high cost of fresh produce in the late 1970s and the limited means of the participants, we can safely assume this would not have been so. Fiscal restraints would have replaced at least some of the fresh produce with industrially produced foodstuffs. Within the institutional framework, however, a specific quantity of savings could be demonstrated that then showed a seemingly tangible success. Within the political climate that was deeply impacted by the welfare-dependency rhetoric of conservatives, the "success" provided relief because it seemed to imply that dependence on government-sponsored food aid decreased.

The production of fresh food at low cost also promised the improvement of another significant problem affecting low-income and black urban residents: their health. In congested

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increasingly sophisticated. They argued that welfare spending was a primary cause of the nation's economic problems and insisted that AFDC created cultural pathologies among the poor, encouraging nonmarital childbearing, discouraging employment, robbing poor adults of dignity, and locking poor children in a cycle of deprivation. They offered punitive welfare reform as a way to revive the work ethic, the two-parent family, and the nation's economic supremacy. Conservatives wielded this anti-welfare discourse most effectively, but many liberal politicians accepted the basic contours of the conservative argument." *Welfare*, 64.

and poor areas of American city environments, low standards in medical care, high pollution rates, dilapidated sanitation infrastructure, as well as malnutrition and undernutrition had affected the health and quality of life of residents since the beginning of city's rise up the American economic ladder. The ghettoization of Blacks in cities produced strongly racialized dimensions of these issues and political and social leaders had grown increasingly concerned with the effects on the social climate. In Detroit, the Urban League (DUL) found in the late 1950s that not only were black incomes significantly below those of whites but also that in a nearly all-black area the tuberculosis rate was 33.3 per 100,000 where a comparable nearly all-white area's was 2 per 100,000. Heart disease rates diverged, with 649.1 and 418.4 per 100,000 for Blacks and whites respectively, and infant mortality lay at 35.1 per 1,000 live births for Blacks and 10,1 for whites.[73] These rates reflected the situation of poor and black people across urban America and became of growing concern in the late 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement became more vocal, radical, and visible in northern and western cities. The Black Panther Party's rapid and nation-wide success has been attributed to their ability to provide grassroots, volunteer-driven responses to these challenges. 4-H and the CES mimicked such community-centered approaches to the urban crisis. The 4-H programs consolidated what they called a *volunteer philosophy* from its inception in 1914 and through it deeply facilitated the expansion of technocratic management of rural communities and facilitated the shift toward mechanized and industrialized agricultural production. In urban communities, the *volunteer philosophy* worked in similar ways, in that it centralized liberal democratic notions through its voluntary work program. As a publication by the Extension Service on its *philosophy* explained: "The educator's job is to develop and maintain a voluntary educational program for youth to maximize youth's opportunity for personal development through organization of local human and other resources."[74] Participants purportedly gain a positive good through personal development. In comparison to earlier examples, the rhetoric stays away from engaging the sentiment of punishment and instead centralizes the notion of free will. However, it is questionable to what degree this will is actually free when it is surrounded by suggestions of benefits, normative constructions of "doing for yourself," and larger societal discourses that construct poverty as a failure to achieve the central mythological goal of upward mobility — the American Dream.

[73] Cf. Fine, 5.
[74] National 4-H Volunteer Leadership Development Committee, "Why Volunteers? A Philosophy," Report, Extension Service, USDA (Washington, D.C.: 1973) Records and Studies Pertaining to 4-H, Box 38, Entry 64, National Archives and Record Administration.

Instead of actually limiting the government's reach, 4-H employs *volunteer leaders* to take over the work of spreading its core values. On paper, within the institutional framework, the agency does appear much smaller because its size is measured in fiscal terms:[75]

> One Extension worker can manage a program that reaches an unlimited number of youth. To do this, he or she must be willing to involve people in administrative roles where they can be directly involved in the design of the appropriate delivery systems for reaching youth. The individual Extension worker was believed to be employed full time in the 1950's if the 4-H enrollment was 250 to 300 members. Analysts of the 1960's assigned the number at 750 to 1,000 per worker. Now, Extension staff have demonstrated that one staff member can manage programs involving two, three, or four thousand members and the complementing adult volunteer support system.

Less professional staff means lower expenses, means lower appropriations, means smaller government. At the same time, however, the internalization of self-government increases significantly. "Each person (member, leader, staff) must be encouraged to grow and develop in usefulness to self and society,"[76] notes an extensive paper on the *volunteer philosophy* of 4-H. The government agency clearly outlines that the core value of its work is to produce "useful" individuals through its engagement while seeing that the institutional and financial investment is as low as possible. This neoliberal project centralizes the internalization of responsibility and productivity within each individual engaging in its activity. The adult actors learn this core value more or less directly through guidelines and training workshops where this *volunteer philosophy* is taught by the extension agents and 4-H staff. They then reproduce these values in their engagement with youth members. "The Extension agent is a manager, trainer, facilitator. Other people must provide the direct contact with youth,"[77] the guidelines state. This management logic provides a top-down system of value production, in which the *volunteer leaders* as well as youth stand at the end of the chain, receiving the message that they should be "useful" to themselves and society. Throughout the process in which volunteers are first trained in the arts of engagement and then reproduce the goals and values of the organization, they do so without receiving a wage or any other security that comes with an employment position at the agency. The *philosophy* thus complements the physical and material dimension of 4-H work in that it de facto externalizes its values as well as its responsibility as an employer to the low-income communities it purportedly helps. From this perspective, a problematic question arises as to who, in fact, benefits from this work? One of the core issues that 4-H was

[75] Ibid.
[76] Highlight in the original, ibid.
[77] Ibid.

facing in its urbanization was how to gain access to these low-income communities and their tight-knit and hierarchical social structures. The volunteer-based structure facilitated the solution to this issue. *Volunteers* were recruited from the local community, which enabled the agency to access the community that might have otherwise been suspicious and reluctant to engage in this government intervention. For the agency, the success was tangible and clear. But were these *volunteers*, were adult and youth participants merely passive subjects of institutional intervention?

In 1977, a new group of youth formed in the North End neighborhood of Detroit, an area that had been deteriorating for some twenty-odd years. 17-year-old John Chatman and about 30 other youth from the neighborhood now claimed a new territory. On Custer between John R. and Brush, they organized to occupy an empty lot, with a seasonal plan in their pockets. Spring saw them clearing the land of trash, big rocks, and whatever else might spoil the ground. They tilled the earth, divided up the land into different sections, constructed even rows, and sowed a variety of herbs, legumes, and vegetables. By early summer, a sea of greens, okra, turnips, salads, snap-beans, tomatoes, and other plants covered the lot. *Operation Green Thumb*, as they called themselves, was in full swing. And the effects could be felt beyond the now formerly vacant lot. Youth divided the plentiful harvest, sharing some out amongst themselves to take home, and giving some to "people who need it,"[78] as John Chatman put it, alluding to neighboring families and elderly who had too little money to afford fresh vegetables and no garden of their own. "We have 14 in our family, nine of them at home […]. I bring some of the stuff home to my mother and it's helped us out a lot. It really came in handy, providing stuff we'd normally have to buy."[79]

However, the teenaged group members didn't just cultivate the lot to help their families and neighbors save money. 10-year-old Michelle, for example, who joined the operation with her 17-year-old sister Mary, took special pleasure in seeing the plants come up and grow. Caring for them and seeing how they transformed and evolved every day was such a joy to her that she started another smaller garden outside her home. Soon, the garden expanded again, this time into the home where she cultivated a myriad of plants in cups and small containers all over the house. She had clearly caught the garden bug. None of these youth had known much about gardening and cultivating plants the previous year, so what had happened to bring about this sudden transformation? In short, the *Growing Roots* program had come to Detroit. At the

[78] Amber Fuller, "City folk find roots in garden program," in: *Detroit News*, July 6, 1977, 2-B.
[79] Ibid.

4-H center, youth acquired these new skills in workshops and demonstration sessions and carried them into their neighborhoods. Before, Mary said, "[w]e just didn't know how to do it […]. You can read about it all day and never really know how to garden. This way we get the visual contact we need."[80] This held true for many teenaged, adult, and elderly people who joined *Growing Roots*. While many of the elderly members, who held fond memories of the gardens of their parents and grandparents down South, were familiar with the work, younger generations lacked this knowledge. The urban gardening program now offered ways to connect individuals and families from low-income economic backgrounds and foster a culture of food cultivation. Many *Growing Roots* participants organized in neighborhood groups, joining together to farm empty lots that would have been too spacious to farm individually. Claude Bell, a 26-year-old resident of the Jeffries Public Housing Project, for example, was part of a group that farmed a lot on Lincoln and Canfield, some five blocks north of their residence. "You can't really have a garden in the Jeffries project," Bell explained to a reporter. "This helps the families out with food costs, since a lot of people here are vegetarians. It's also something to channel the interests of the younger people, to keep them out of gangs."[81] Here, Bell touches on the two major themes that emerged when I studied the archived sources of the Extension Service on *Growing Roots*: saving on food costs as a coping strategy for the economic underclass, and intervening in juvenile delinquency.

The numbers rose steadily over the following years, reaching 6,995 participants by 1979.[82] A survey conducted by the end of the first growing season revealed that the program was hugely popular among participants: 92 percent wanted to join the program again in the following year and 94 percent stated that they knew people who wanted to participate in the future. On average, each spent around 14 hours every week filling empty lots with social and plant life.[83] Overall, participants seem to have largely farmed in groups. "Those who applied for permits included: block clubs, neighborhood associations, school groups, churches, youth groups, senior citizens, and some individuals,"[84] reports Beser. Unfortunately, no data on the gender, race, or age of participants, or the exact locations of farmed lots, was collected and preserved in the municipal records of *Farm-A-Lot*. The survey, however, did consider the

[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Who were estimated to have cultivated crops valued $500,000, $1.7m in today's value. Cf. "Seven Ways …". In 1985, some 1,100 participants partook and harvested crops worth $173,000, or $404,000 today. Cf. Lawson, 227.
[83] Beser and Young, "Farm-A-Lot Initial Site…".
[84] Ann R. Beser: "Farm-A-Lot Progress Report," 6 June, 1975. In: Coleman Young Collection, Box 46, Folder 11, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

economic dimension of urban farming in its evaluation measure: 39 percent of participants stated that they were currently unemployed and able to "drastically reduce" their food costs by participating in *Farm-A-Lot*.[85] Another study showed that per lot, and under the right circumstances (planning and climate), crops of around $1,000 value[86] could be cultivated and harvested.[87] Furthermore, estimations projected that each participant harvested about 75 pounds of produce over the course of the season. As plant cultivation skills are often a matter of experience, the program runners optimistically stated "that families enrolling for a second year might be able to up their harvest savings by as much as $100, now that they know more about basic gardening techniques."[88]

These numbers give some insight into the impact urban farming had on individual participants and their household economies. During World War II, the American food system had been further industrialized and transformed due to the war effort. This produced a system that ran on highly processed foods. Fresh fruit and vegetables became luxury items for the poor, as they offered fewer calories for the same price and demanded additional time, effort, and energy to be turned into meals.[89] While data on dietary changes in connection to urban farming was not collected in these early stages of urban agricultural practice in Detroit, it is safe to assume that participants, particularly of lower economic standing, were able to include fresher and more nutritious foods into their diets. Media depictions offer a tentative insight into the individual stories that made up the transformations taking place. They also highlight transformations in the program itself. While from an administrative point of view *Farm-A-Lot* was seemingly originally designed to take the costly expense of empty lots off the city's hands, the effects of the new source of urban food supply gained *Farm-A-Lot* more traction in the early 1980s.

At this point, yet another recession had affected the American economy, and again, Detroit's uniform and frail economy amplified effects in the city. The *Farm-A-Lot* program reacted by promoting a food aid strategy for the 1983 growing season. They called on their members to plant what they termed *bumper crops* that would be donated to soup kitchens and other hunger-relief organizations across the city. At this point, according to estimations, around 68,000 Detroiters were farming roughly 17,000 lots and gardens.[90] Interestingly, this food crisis

[85] Cf. Beser and Young, "Farm-A-Lot Initial Site…".
[86] $5,100 today, cf. "Seven Ways".
[87] Cf. Beser and Young, "Farm-A-Lot Initial Site…".
[88] June Hicks, "Gardening program due to expand," *Detroit News*, April 14, 1978.
[89] Cf. Marion Nestle. *Food Politics. How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
[90] Cf. Kelly Burgess, "Harvest of hope for the poor" *Detroit News*, August 31, 1983.

saw more and more members of *Farm-A-Lot* farming in their own yards, using the program only to claim seed packages and information.[91] Coleman Young's original hope of ridding the city of its abandoned properties became less relevant over the years. Instead, the program facilitated the spreading of the practice and a growing recognition that urban agriculture could aid the food security of marginalized communities. *Growing Roots* membership also dwindled to 1,145 in 1985,[92] which suggests that, by this point, most urban growers were knowledgeable enough to cultivate crops independently — as the CES had strategized, from sowing the seed of facilitation, an urban agri-*culture* had sprouted.

Churches often provided space and resources for members of their congregation. Such community gardens proved to be especially beneficial when it came to producing *bumper crops* for hunger relief. A *Detroit News* article entitled "City slickers save cash by growing own food" shows that church groups participating in *Farm-A-Lot* amplified the relief effort by involving their own social networks and infrastructure. Diane Katz reports: "Members of Presbytery of Detroit are planting their free seeds in church gardens throughout the city. Their harvest will feed visitors at 13 locations run by the group to help others."[93] Volunteers at St. Leo's Church also signed up to "stock their soup kitchen at 4726 Grand River with produce grown in their Farm-a-Lot plot on 14th Street."[94] To the practitioners, this form of volunteerism signified community outreach. Working communally on lots to cultivate produce for the purpose of food aid supplied them not only with produce but, perhaps more importantly so, with a sense of shared values that united engaged neighbors and community members. As the hunger action coordinator of the Presbytery, Artheillia Thompson, stated: "We wanted to try to aid ourselves."[95] This notion of self-reliance suggests that *Farm-A-Lot* facilitated food-aid without ensnaring recipient communities in a discourse of dependence. By opening barren urban spaces up to agriculture, *Farm-A-Lot* unintentionally created room for communal food production. This set a strong counterpoint to the individualized approaches to hunger prevalent in the US welfare system. During this period of renewed crisis *Farm-A-Lot* tried to amplify its effect without increasing costs for the program. In addition to engaging these well-connected and well-equipped church groups, members were urged to sign up as mentors for new and inexperienced farmers.[96] This, again, demonstrates the central importance of collaboration in

[91] Cf. Diane Katz: "City slickers save cash by growing own food," *Detroit News*, June 16, 1983.
[92] Cf. Lawson, 227.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Cf. Betty Frankel, "They provide everything but rain" *Detroit Free Press*, May 4, 1984.

Farm-A-Lot. Volunteerism, by and large, was used to negotiate a lack of funding, and a culture of self-help grew on these lots as a result. So while *Farm-A-Lot* started out as an underfunded city program to beautify and ideally outsource burdensome urban land, the diverse human activities surrounding urban food production shaped collaborative and solidary practices. These practices demonstrate how participants went beyond the framework of *Farm-A-Lot* and fostered an approach to food aid that lies beyond a discourse of government dependence and created more participatory modes of aid. When communities came together to share resources and care for those who were unable to grow their own food, they built moments of solidarity that went beyond the institutional objectives of saving on food costs. In these moments, participants expressed their own moral agency in ways that the institutional framework could not measure in statistics. They formed a local culture of solidarity that used urban agriculture as a place-making as well as a community-building practice and went beyond the objectives of technocratic intervention.

As part of a federal agency, 4-H is subject to regular and intensive investigations into its programs. In order to get approval for appropriations, the services offered have to follow strict guidelines and show their effectiveness in annual reports. Therefore, on the one hand, spending is tightly controlled, which narrows and directs what 4-H can and cannot do. On the other hand, there is tremendous pressure to justify what it has done and is planning on doing in the future, in particular in the following fiscal year. Every past and future project has to be sufficiently justified in order to secure the reauthorization of funding. This structural, institutional pressure affects, shapes, and severely restricts the organization's mode of operations. The congressional funds for the urban gardening program that 4-H administered, for example, could be spent on staff that would "supervise, teach, and demonstrate urban gardening […] and when appropriate to recruit, select, and train volunteers."[97] However, material costs could only be covered when they served "teaching and practical demonstration purposes." Urban agricultural work, like all farming practices, demands a significant investment in resources and materials. From the purchase of soil, seeds, and plants to gardening tools, perhaps even watering systems, and the access to land, which can come with rental or purchasing costs as well as possible expenses for tax payments, urban gardening puts a strain on the wallet of anyone engaging in the practice. In Detroit, the *Farm-A-Lot* program mitigated some of these structural restraints, but the reliance on donations, especially for seeds and gardening tools, remained. Here and in other

[97] Science and Education Administration, "4-H Expansion in Urban Areas 1973-1978," report (Washington, DC: Extension Administration, undated), Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.

cities participating in *Growing Roots*, the professional staff and volunteers had to be creative and resourceful. This was especially the case since the participants had little money to spare. The restraints seem particularly puzzling when considering that the program's explicit objectives revolved around working to alleviate the food security of low-income communities. 4-H's urbanization efforts can be seen as a direct response to the political demand to demonstrate that 4-H was not only *effective* in its use of tax dollars, but also that the participants in its programs had sufficient *need* for these programs. The underlying assumption driving this re-orientation was that people living in poverty were in a particular need of assistance.

Simultaneously, urban poverty differed substantially from the experiences that the agency had gained working with rural and poor communities. However, whereas the CES counteracted and thus framed rural poverty by providing interactive spaces where community members would meet with each other in spite of the often large distances between their homes, and gain and exchange knowledge, urban poverty manifested itself in spatially different ways. Here, people lived in close quarters to each other and social networks were often tightly knit, providing stability and resilience in the face of scarce resources. To a government agency like the Extension Service, these communities were difficult to access and moving to address and approach this new kind of audience meant that new ways and means to engage and get in contact with poor city dwellers needed to be found. The vast intellectual resources provided by the land-grant university system and its numerous scholars and researchers were hence employed to provide insight into the lives and needs of poor and urban people. During the 1960s, various studies and papers on these specific audiences were presented at Extension Service workshops and seminars, which would shape how the agency conducted business in the 1970s.

Detroit and Beyond

In the myriad of studies and expert knowledge that land-grant scholars and extension personnel assembled to assist the 4-H move into urban areas, the city of Detroit took on an exemplary position. To the researchers Detroit was not just an enclosed city entity, but a city existing in relation to a larger region. At the same time, the city signified demographic particularities they were observing in urban areas across the state. Noting that Detroit is joined by Pontiac, Flint, Mt. Clemens, Lansing, Jackson, and Ann Arbor to make up the southeast of Michigan, the Plans of Work of the Michigan CES highlight specifically that "[c]ollectively, these counties

comprise nearly 70% of the state population."[98] For one, this concentration of the population in predominantly urbanized areas made the region especially relevant for the 4-H agency as it was urbanizing. Additionally, the sources reveal a keen awareness of the concentration of minority populations in southwest Michigan. The extension agents noted that 70 percent of all minorities resided in Wayne County (the county that contains Detroit). Within the dual efforts to urbanize and diversify the agency in Michigan, Detroit therefore exemplified the largest social entity for such an undertaking. The consideration of future demographic developments in the region further highlighted and alleviated the significance of the city for the CES and 4-H. As the overall population growth rate in Michigan was stagnating, extension agents concluded that "[t]his may well concentrate minorities to an even greater degree in the metro areas."[99]

The concentration of minority groups in inner-city areas was mirrored in the overall concentration of the population in urban areas. As economic interests continued to drive suburbanization, the so-called "edge cities" kept on expanding further into formerly rural areas. As David Harvey observes, these advanced capitalist developments went far beyond the suburban fringes, into "every village and every rural retreat," that became part of "a complex web of urbanization that defies any simple categorization of populations into 'urban' and 'rural' in that sense which once upon a time could reasonably be accorded to those terms."[100] As cities like Detroit saw a growing concentration of minority groups in their urban centers, the surrounding suburbs were expanding. The effect of this urban sprawl had implications for rural regions surrounding cities all across the state and the larger Great Lakes region. In Michigan, a state that had a large and multifaceted history of agricultural production beyond its industrial hubs, the implications affected rural farming communities and their political representatives. The agency that had long conducted the majority of its activities in rural communities was now paying particular attention to the implications of expanding suburban entities for its surrounding hinterlands. "Despite this urban concentration, there is a large amount of commercial agriculture and the intensive fruit and vegetable industries surrounding the cities and bordering suburbs. But each year, the urban sprawl pushes further into agricultural areas raising problems not only for the agricultural industry but for community development and

[98] CES, MI, "Plan of Work, Michigan, 1981-82" internal report (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1982) Records of the Extension Service, Plans of Work 1975-1984, Box 22, National Archives and Records Administration.
[99] Ibid.
[100] David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 404.

public policy as well."[101] To the CES, thus, urban centers had much broader spatial and social implications. This increased the importance of urban engagement and the agency's intervention in the urban crisis. At the same time, it presented a challenge to the self-preservation of 4-H and the larger Extension Service, who urgently noted that 4-H had "little choice than to become more innovative to reach new audiences and add new educational dimensions."[102] Within this context, the engagement with urban agriculture in Detroit revealed tremendous internal tensions. Government agencies were under pressure to react to much broader socio-geographic changes in the United States.

The tension was further increased by the racialized nature of these transformations. As white-flight suburbanization drained Detroit of much of its wealth, the youth agency that had carefully cultivated and propagated an image of rural agrarian futurism was conspicuously present in the lily-white suburbs. Some youth agents problematized the fact that 4-H had been relatively absent from inner cities. William Mills, for example, pointed out that "For many years 4-H programs existed only in the outlying suburban areas of Wayne County."[103] For example, Macomb County just north of the Detroit city line had 3,580 mini-gardens under the auspices of 4-H in 1977.[104] Mills continued to note that while there had been considerable activity in the surrounding suburbs, "4-H is also relevant to urban youth."[105] This implies that urbanizing 4-H meant that inner-city Detroit was spatially constructed along racial lines as not-suburban. One of the early urban 4-H programs in Michigan, "Operation Get-Acquainted", offered inner-city youth weeklong stays on farms or in suburban homes. The extension report cheerfully comments that this "experience makes it possible to develop greater appreciation and understanding between affluent and low-income families."[106] This example shows that the agencies approach to inner-city expansion built on the premise of deficiencies that arose from the binary racial and economic constructions of these spatial entities. While inner-city youth was encouraged to experience suburban and wealthy lives, no programs existed to expose suburban youth to inner-city lives, speaking to the difference in values that the agency placed on these areas and the communities living in them.

Central to 4-H's construction of urban space was the focus on crime and insecurity.

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[101] CES, MI, "Plan of Work…1981-82."
[102] Ibid.
[103] Extension Service Review, "Freedom to Be…" *4-H Magazine* (Washington, DC: USDA, 1977).
[104] Cf. CES, MI, "Annual Progress Report, 1976-77, Michigan" (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1977) Records of the Extension Service, Cooperative Agreements, 1977-1981, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.
[105] Emphasis in the original, "Freedom to Be…"
[106] FES, "4-H in the cities."

During the early efforts of exploring urban expansion, 4-H leaders met in national conferences to discuss this new direction, frequently raising the issue of how to engage with youth living urban areas by discussing the lives and values of *the ghetto*, as they referred to these areas. Establishing connections meant to invite "ex-drug addicts, ex-convicts and ex-prostitutes."[107] Stigma and fear characterized many accounts of 4-H agents: "Many of us carry around in our heads pictures of what disadvantaged youth are like — aggressive, hostile, uncommunicative, perhaps independent, creative."[108] Internally, a discussion of this framing broke out, with some researchers pointing out that "[i]n the current concern about ghetto youth, we may be studying the wrong things. We concentrate on the relatively few who get into trouble. What about the many who don't?" which counteracted the overall sentiment of overwhelming disparity and offered an opportunity for engagement. The question of race was woven into these musings, as the overwhelmingly white 4-H leaders discussed questions such as "[c]an white people work effectively in the ghetto?"[109]

This racialized framing of urban space as insecure continued to shape the urbanization of 4-H and how this was communicated in internal reports as well as 4-H publications. Detroit was no exception to that. In the September-October 1977 issue of the Extension Service Review, for example, 4-H activity in Detroit is directly related to crime and residents' feelings of insecurity in their neighborhoods. "A long-time community resident said, 'I haven't taken a vacation in 6 years. I was afraid to leave my house empty."[110] In the article, the 4-H club activities are then highlighted as working especially to target the issue of insecurity. 4-H agents approaching youth and engaging with them in programs originating in rural areas is presented as working to reform these spaces. A reduction of these feelings of insecurity is portrayed to result from this intervention, with the article concluding that "4-H can be successfully applied to urban populations and problems."[111] Five years before these reports, architect and urban planner Oscar Newman had risen to fame with his popular book *Defensible Space*, in which he theorized connections between urban design and human security. Among other things, Newman popularized the idea of gated communities and the notion that fences and walls could create such *defensible spaces*. Central to his concept is the idea of permanence and reliability

[107] National 4-H Club Foundation, "Special Report: Urban 4-H," (Washington, D.C., 1969), 5, Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to the 4-H Urban Programs, Box 2, Entry 42, National Archives and Records Administration.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 3.
[110] ESR, "Freedom to Be…".
[111] Ibid.

provided by the structures that counteract, if not prevent, the dangers of the unforeseen.[112] While I find Newman's concept problematic, the popularity of his work has had a tremendous effect on built environments in the U.S. and fundamentally shaped the discourse on residential security as well as urban planning. I suggest that his influence went beyond architectural transformations and into the fundamental way urban spaces are imagined. These government-led youth interventions show a parallel approach, where the engagement of government actors with youth that might commit delinquent acts, works as a symbolic fence in the eyes of youth agents and local residents. The engagement in activities that are associated with the racially connoted safety of rural romanticism, becomes a perceived socio-spatial fence against speculative as well as real experiences that create these affective insecurities.

For the agency, the notion of insecurity and delinquency signified a major purpose for their urban engagements. Internal reports repeatedly highlight the dire economic situation the city was experiencing in the mid-1970s and the effects this was having on public and private urban spaces:[113]

> Many youth must live in rundown dilapidated housing, and in noisy, dirty, overcrowded neighborhoods. Inadequate information, high population density, poor schools, and stressful, aggressive victimizing neighborhoods appear to be responsible for a myriad of ills that include: poor school performance, lack of pride, inability to leave "ghetto" areas, and "victimization" by unprincipled advertisers or merchants.

It is important to note that the focus of the internal as well as external reports exclusively focused on the situation of youth, frequently citing juvenile delinquency as one of the major urban issues. Adult criminal activity is not addressed in 4-H's framing of urban space and the construction of these spaces focuses solely on the lives of youth. This puts the urban gardening program that was open to all age groups and that 4-H was administering in a rather paradoxical position. The forces running it paid such detailed attention to the conduct of youth, while the adults living with and around them remained on the fringes of their perspective. The McClellan Center from which the urban gardening program was administered was located in Detroit's east side. Reports frequently point out that it lay in the heart of Detroit's second highest crime area. Assessing the impact of 4-H activity meant measuring its reach into the surrounding

[112] Cf. Harvey (1996), 291-295.
[113] Ralph Abbott, "Process & Impact Evaluation: The Detroit 4-H Program," Final Report Prepared for the Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service (East Lansing, October 1976), Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 3, Entry 42, National Archives and Records Administration.

communities and changes in juvenile delinquency statistics, with extension administrators concluding that the highest impact could be seen in a two-mile radius around the center.[114] To a large degree, the urban gardening program was thus framed by the institution as a tool to intervene in the conduct of youth, with less attention being paid to the more obvious impacts of urban crop production, such as producing food for human consumption. The division of labor within government agencies like the extension service and 4-H reveals a narrow focus with which they conduct their work. As we see below, 4-H agents eventually realized and problematized this lopsided approach.

Within the broader context of Michigan, Detroit became a pioneer city for 4-H urban programs. Urban agriculture became the premiere means for this strategic development to urbanize the agency as it proved to be particularly popular. Moving beyond the federal *Growing Roots* program in Detroit, 4-H expanded urban agriculture and programs sprang up in cities across the state. One year after the *Growing Roots* program started, the state of Michigan provided an additional $1,000,000 to expand urban gardening into other cities in the region.[115] As 4-H was administering these programs and pushing to urbanize, an additional $750,000 were made available in the mid-fiscal year of 1978 by the State of Michigan for the expansion of 4-H into other Michigan cities. Seven urban counties benefitted from this development, with plans set in place to increase the number by five additional urban areas.[116] Two years into the federal program, the CES notes in its annual Plan of Work that "As materials developed for the 'Growing Roots' Program are extended to other parts of the state and as its success and techniques are spread through the media, we expect the involvement in youth in this area to increase by 5,000 in fiscal year 1979."[117] By 1980, 4-H had moved into 14 urban areas across Michigan.

[114] Ibid.
[115] Cf. CES, MI, "Plan of Work, Michigan, 1978-79" internal report (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1982) Records of the Extension Service, Plans of Work 1975-1984, Box 22, National Archives and Records Administration.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

Welfare, Poverty, and Reform

These papers and publications shed light on the agency's construction of poverty, but they also provide insight into the larger societal discourse that these discussions are embedded in. Keep in mind how the debate on poverty and welfare has historically been tied to cultural ideas and larger narratives that have interwoven the idea of economic mobility with ideas about willpower, merit, and the freedom of the individual.[118] Within this convolution, a juxtaposition between the "worthy" and the "unworthy" poor has fundamentally shaped the poverty discourse from the colonial period onwards. "Those individuals who society believed were impoverished through no fault of their own were considered 'deserving,' while poor people who were deemed idle or lacking a work ethic were considered 'undeserving.'"[119] These constructions have not only undergirded the discourse on poverty and welfare but also cemented the notion that the fate of one's life lies in the hands of the individual person. Heike Paul has described such narratives as *The Myths that Made America.* She argues that while narrative ideas such as the American Dream or the myth of the self-made man have given hope to countless Americans across time and space, they have remained myths.[120] Nonetheless they have driven the discourse on wealth and the lack thereof, and driven arguments that frame poverty to a large extent as the result of individual failures of willpower and effort, as every person is supposedly free to be socially mobile. The poverty discourse reveals variations on this theme and these underlying assumptions have informed the negotiations of poverty as well as the resulting reactions to it. While the CES's move into urban areas sheds light on larger societal ideas about poverty, they also come at a time when these ideas are undergoing vast transformations. Progressive activists at the turn of the century had once spurred heightened attention to poverty in urban as well as rural areas in their efforts to intervene in these crises. Social reformers like Jane Addams had engaged with poor communities in housing projects like the Hull House in Chicago. In these projects, well-educated activists and educators "took up residence in poor neighborhoods to better the lives of largely immigrant families through educational programs, including cooking classes to 'Americanize' ethnic culinary patterns, vocational training, and other community services."[121] Inspired by Jacobs, these model projects

[118] Cf. Chapter II.
[119] Nadasen, Premilla et. al. *Welfare in the United States. A history with Documents, 1935-1996* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3.
[120] Heike Paul, *The Myths That Made America* ("Bielefeld": transcript, 2014).
[121] Marcie Cohen Ferris, *The Edible South. The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 2014), 138.

were reproduced in poor communities in other industrial northern cities as well as southern rural areas. Research institutions like the University of Chicago reacted to the popularity of muckraking accounts of urban poverty with a host of research projects and several ethnographic studies. However, by the 1930s urban poverty research and public interest in this particular topic were waning and lay rather dormant until the 1960s.[122]

In the meantime, the discussions around poverty relief shifted due to the significant events that affected large parts of U.S. society and thus focused on bigger scales. Franklin D. Roosevelt's *New Deal* policies (1933-1937) following the Great Depression intervened in the prolonged economic crisis by significantly expanding the role of the federal government and creating a host of agencies that centered around what has become known as the *Three Rs*: relief for the poor and the unemployed, recovery for the crumbling economy, and reform of the financial sector that had set the depression in motion. The relief programs first established a social security system and created numerous employment opportunities through infrastructure programs. The Public Works Administration, for example, organized and funded the construction of numerous schools, municipal buildings, public infrastructure projects, and parks that created jobs for many unemployed persons. In 1941, *freedom from want* became part of the Roosevelt administration's efforts to mobilize the American public for World War II when the President delivered his *Four Freedoms* speech and subsequently inspired the establishment of an *adequate standard of living* as a pillar for international development work. Within the U.S. the expansion of the federal government found numerous critics. While economic authorities such as Milton Friedman contended that the New Deal Relief programs were appropriate reactions to the long-lasting depression, long-term poverty relief programs were regarded as putting an unnecessary strain on the national economy. This criticism was revived in the 1960s, when first John F. Kennedy and then Lyndon B. Johnson expanded food assistance and social welfare programs. In 1964, President Johnson declared a *War on Poverty* and announced that poverty would be cured, if not prevented, instead of merely relieving the symptoms.[123] While legislation such as the *Food Stamp Act* continued and expanded the relief approach to poverty, the *Economic Opportunity Act* also worked to alleviate poverty through job training and education programs. *Community action* approaches introduced ways for poor people to participate in and design some of the agendas that were catering to them. However,

[122] Cf. William Julius Wilson and Robert Aponte, "Urban Poverty," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 11 (Jan 1985), 231-258.

[123] Lyndon B. Johnson, "First State of the Union Address," January 8, 1964, online: https://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/lbj1964stateoftheunion.htm (accessed January 2, 2020).

much of the legislation was flawed. The Food Stamp Act, for example, came under mounting criticism in 1967 after critics contended that in "many of the poorest areas the substitution of food stamps for the older direct distribution system meant a sharp drop in participation among those who could not afford the minimum purchase requirement of $2 for each individual per month."[124] By 1968, the *War on Poverty* seemed like a failure to many and opposition to the government's seeming inaction formed. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Cristian Leadership Conference organized the Poor People's March on Washington, which turned into a six-week protest camp on the Washington Mall. The campaign demanded economic justice for poor Americans of all backgrounds, formulating the idea that any person should have the basic means to live. The USDA came under significant pressure as protesters decried the agency's neglect of small farms and institutional racism against black and Mexican American farmers. Reverend Ralph Abernathy, who had assumed the leadership after Martin Luther King's assassination, and other leaders of the campaign placed the hunger issue at the center of their protest, convinced it was the most urgent problem, and that the USDA could alleviate it.[125] Within a few short weeks, the USDA, which was traditionally lethargic and more than reluctant to respond to matters of civil rights, found itself at the center of the conversation about poverty and race.

Within the Extension Service the transformations of the national poverty discourse had already inspired renewed interest in the subject, causing the debate about the nature of poverty to change within the agency. Speaking at a conference on the urban future of 4-H in 1966, Dr. Deton J. Brooks, Jr. had argued in line with the prevailing framework of poverty, suggesting that a *culture of poverty* lay at the root of the problem. Brooks, Executive Director of the Chicago Committee on Urban Opportunity, elaborated to 125 4-H representatives from 46 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia on how poverty was to be understood: "What we have in the United States is a separate and distinct sub-culture composed of the disadvantaged of our society. This sub-culture of poverty is a multi-dimensional syndrome of disadvantages characterized by its own standards of acceptable behavior and its own social customs totally independent of those of society as a whole. Poverty is more than an economic, social or culture condition. It is a way of life."[126] Brooks continued with his diagnosis, asserting

[124] Norwood Allen Kerr, "Drafted into the War on Poverty: USDA Food and Nutrition Programs, 1961-1969," *Agricultural History* (Spring 1990), 163.
[125] Cf. Don F. Hadwinger, "The Freeman Administration and the Poor," *Agricultural History* (Jan. 1, 1971), 21f.
[126] "Program Development Studies Urban Areas 1966" report (Washington, DC: Extension Administration, 1966), Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.

that "[t]he individual entrapped within the sub-culture of poverty is physically and mentally alienated from the cultural mainstream."[127] In this framing, poverty becomes more than an economic condition and takes on the form of a pathological cultural practice.[128] This totalizing and stigmatizing point of view had shaped government agencies' approaches to working with economically underprivileged communities since the late 1950s and was now coming under mounting pressure due to the activities of groups like the *Poor People's Campaign*. Within the Extension Service, the framing that Brooks was presenting found mounting opposition as more researchers were tasked with finding applicable ways for engaging with the urban poor. Professor of Educational Psychology Frank Riessman stood in opposition to Brooks in 1966 and called for a different approach. He argued that the "notion that there was some deep culture of poverty resistance on the part of the poor to the kinds of programs that [the Extension Service] might offer"[129] was inhibiting the urbanization of the agency and in his opinion, this view was dated. "Up to about five years ago, it was very characteristic to say — in relation to getting involvement of low-income groups [—] that they were hard to reach. It was supposedly hard to convince them, for example, to use new birth control information. It was hard to convince them to use health information; to get pre-natal examinations; to get immunity tests, etc."[130] This reflects failing efforts by federal agencies like the CES to understand the realities of life in poverty that drove people's choices to reject such services. Long waiting periods often clashed with the manifold time pressures poor people experienced in their everyday lives and a lack of clarity as to the benefits of the programs stirred up suspicions. Furthermore, Riessman critiqued the concept of the *culture of poverty* that was used to explain these failing efforts to engage people of low economic standing in their programs. He asserted that attributes like apathy, fatalism, superstition, or lack of planning did not constituted a culture but were "a selected set of attributes largely emphasizing limitations of the poor."[131] Riessman contended that this view doomed efforts to engage with poor communities by putting front and center the notion of first having to change this supposed *culture*, a task that had been deemed insurmountable.

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[127] Ibid.
[128] Cf. James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1994* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 115-125.
[129] Frank Riessman, "Community Action with the Poor," report (Washington, DC: Extension Administration, 1966), Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

A *practice-oriented* reframing of poor people served as an alternative to the *culture of poverty* approach and was instrumental in facilitating the urbanization of the Extension Service. Riessman's paper is exemplary for how the agency went about this task. Instead of focusing on assumed deficits, he argued for the need to "emphasize not their weaknesses but their strengths. And picking out selected weaknesses which were quite changeable and formulating those weaknesses in very changeable terms."[132] He then asserted that "one of the positive strengths of these groups is that they very much like to learn when things are 'for real' — not just in a classroom — but learning from doing, learning from practice…" Thus, the service should be designed to be *accessible*, *attractive* — meaning respecting the time constraints of participants — and visible in the community. The reach into poor communities was enabled and strengthened through the re-appropriation of the Extension Service's long-held practice of engaging community members as employees and volunteers. "[Our] services can be most efficiently delivered without any big change of the culture […] by hiring the agents of the culture,"[133] Riessman argued. Interestingly, while he stood in opposition to the outright notion of a *culture of poverty*, he still enforced the notion of strong cultural differences, which speaks to his problematic perspective on the racial make-up of these communities. Several decades before Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* to describe the entanglement of multilayered discrimination, Riessman offers us an apt example of the interwoven stigma of race and class.

While these efforts to reframe people living in poverty opened up new ways to engage with them for the CES, the transformation did not serve to emancipate these audiences. Instead, the Extension Service devised a strategy catering to their own goals of accessing poor communities in order to reproduce their own values and practices. Riessman laid out a foundation for this goal. First, he advised extension agents to slow down their practices and instead of going into communities with a clear vision for a program in mind, have informal meetings with community members where they could share their grievances over a cup of coffee and snacks. In these settings, agents would get also get an impression of the social hierarchy and dynamics, ultimately enabling them to identify those "who have some connection to the people in the neighborhood, some similarity, some knowledge of the neighborhood traditions, and can also talk to us. I call them 'bridge' people, bridge people who can communicate with both worlds…"[134] While some of these community members gained

[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.

employment through this new strategy, their efforts were invariably subject to the interests and values of the Extension Service. It goes without saying that the vast majority of such *bridge people* never earned a wage through the CES. As Riessman confidently put it: The goal was to "essentially utiliz[e] representatives of the poor, the non-professional aides in order to involve the people, deliver the service, have them utilize it appropriately, etc."[135] This suggests that the change within the Extension Service was limited and merely served to facilitate the agency's move into urban and poor communities. It was a technocratic undertaking serving the objectives of the agency rather than aiming to tackle the racist economic structures that had led to the segregation of so many people of color into urban neighborhoods.

Over the following years, this technocratic and managerial reframing was disseminated throughout, and beyond, the CES. In the spring of 1969, an internal magazine-like publication called *Special Report*, which was widely circulated within the organization, carried the new message over into the 4-H clubs. In an article entitled "Who are the Poor?", Catherine V. Richards dispersed these evolving scientific "insights" with the paternalistic voice of expertise:[136]

> It has been found by many that the poor do have strengths and the capacity to use those strengths even when the odds seem insurmountable. Generally, it has been learned that the poor are not necessarily a desolate, incompetent, disorganized people. Some are. Some are not. But they are folks who are neighborly; who are mutually helpful; who are compassionate; who are perceptive and who are probably more tolerant than the middle classes. Even their suspicion of do-gooders is probably a strength, for many have done the poor in by following the rule books, by operating from the view that the poor are "incompetents."

While the tone of her text is condescending, it also shows how Richards tries to construct a counter-narrative to the prevailing prejudices against people of low economic status. She does so by highlighting values that they share with or even supposedly embody more than the *middle classes*. In this way, she communicates to her audience — 4-H staff and invested volunteers, whom we may situate deeply within said middle classes — the commonalities in values. Thus, Richards demonstrated to her readers that, as opposed to the disengaged *culture of poverty* reading, the poor could be reformed, if only it was done for a reason, and in a way, that would not *do them in*. These patronizing constructions of new silver linings were accompanied by an urgent call for intervention, with Richards pointing out the large number of children that lived

[135] Ibid.
[136] Catharine V. Richards, "Who are the poor?" *Special Report* (Washington, DC: Extension Administration, 1966), Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.

in low economic conditions. "If subsistence needs and the size of families are included, it is estimated that 15 million children lived in poverty in [1964]. This represents more than half the non-white children of the Nation [sic] (59 percent) and 15 percent of the white children." The severity of urban child and youth poverty took on an elevated role in the publication, underlining the message that 4-H needed to become involved in these milieus.

The discourse within 4-H framed the effects of poverty on urban and predominantly black youth along the lines of youth delinquency. According to the 4-H framing, the problems of inner-city youth did not stem from underfunded and crumbling schools or a lack of perspective facing systemic unemployment, but rather they were limited to the issue that 4-H could actually intervene in: the conduct of youth. Two other articles in the aforementioned *Special Report* offered voices from the black community — albeit not from within the black and poor community — and served to inform the readership on the extend and the effect of their racial prejudices. These voices came from two professors at Howard University, a historically black university that is commonly referred to as the "Black Harvard," which demonstrates the continued reliance on expert knowledge reporting on the situation of those affected. One article addressed the dominant discourse on poor and black youth in cities, or as the author Roy J. Jones put it, using the prevalent tone, "the current concern about ghetto youth." Jones, psychologist and Professor of Urban Studies, mirrored Riessman's advice to focus on the *positives*. "[W]e may be studying the wrong things. We concentrate on the relatively few who get into trouble. What about the many who don't?"[137] Jones contextualized and explained the situation of urban, poor and black communities, for example by putting the one-sided critique of black families in to the context of the overall situation of struggling families with low economic backgrounds, and educating the readers on the psychological and political significance of Black Power for African American communities. "Black kids have to stop hating themselves. A child must grow up loving his big nose, his thick lips and kinky hair. He is beautiful by those standards, not by Nordic standards. Before there can be psychological integration, identity must be developed, and institutions must be changed."[138] To Jones, this change in 4-H could not be achieved without a significant effort by the agency to employ black youth agents. He pointed at what we today recognize as a *white savior complex* and argued that "the well meaning [sic!] white usually has a streak of racism, too, which he does not recognize

[137] Roy J. Jones, "Understanding Myself and Others" *Special Report* (Washington, DC: Extension Administration, 1966), Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.
[138] Ibid.

himself. This may express itself as paternalism and condescension. Racism is characteristic of the institutions of our society, and these, as well as attitudes, must be changed."[139] Jones provided a strong arguments and insights for the transformation of 4-H. In his opinion, government intervention in the urban crisis would not just have to target black families and communities, it would have to be carried by them. Furthermore, he argued, that the intervention could not simply focus on blacks, but that 4-H needed to "work to eradicate racism in the white community"[140] as well.

Jones's arguments stood in contrast to the general approach of the Extension Service to black and poor communities. Indeed, the discourse on the *ghetto youth* was intrinsically tied to a larger perspective on urban black and poor families and the communities surrounding them. In 1966, a Special Task Force that worked to tackle the issue of urban expansion assembled the *Guidelines, Principles, and Procedures for Starting 4-H Educational Programs in Housing Projects and City Slums*. In it, the Task Force reaffirmed strongly gendered racial stereotypes:[141]

> One-parent families predominate in housing developments […] Mothers may be employed full-time while children are in school […]. Men are not available to assume continuous leadership responsibilities. […] Women have the cultural attributes necessary to place a "people" rather than "project" emphasis on program opportunities. The mother-interest in children is higher than with the few fathers living in public housing developments. Although there are wide differences among neighborhoods, blocks, cities and areas of the country, most of the men in housing developments are transients. In some cases men living with the families are not related to the mother and children.

The critical framing of family structures clearly reflected the predominance of white, middle-class normativity based on the nuclear-family idea within the Extension Service. The guidelines, furthermore, affirmed the gendered binary that was central to this construction, and that has been instrumental throughout the history of racist and colonial violence. Impermanence, or *transience*, in family structures lay at the heart of the critique rather than hunger, crumbling schools, or police violence that caused so many urban riots and are some of the central issues for black and poor urban communities. The managerial tone of the guidelines masked this normative framing and guided the focus of the reader — 4-H leadership and staff

[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Emphasis in the original, "Guidelines Starting 4H in Housing Projects and Slums 1966" in (Washington, DC: Extension Administration, 1966), Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.

across the country — toward the objectives of technocratic intervention. For the agency, first and foremost, access needed to be gained. "Often there is a strong anti-feeling to any outside 'authorities,'"[142] the paper notes and suggests extensive action to overcome such *barriers*. "Most of the current Extension professional staff lack insight into the problems of urban people und are not trained to really make an impact in urban housing areas. Techniques and competency in the social sciences needs increased emphasis."[143] This approach differed sharply from Roy J. Jones's notions. Whereas he suggested a reciprocal, and rather emancipatory, way in which communities could take over and shape the programs themselves, the guidelines outline a more effective concept for bringing outside *experts* into these communities. In this way, the guidelines worked to preserve the structure as well as the value system of the Extension Service.

These continuities remained hidden to much of the outside world, as media reports of 4-H's move into cities focused on the differences compared to rural 4-H programs and painted the picture of a great transformation. A 1970 article in the Wall Street Journal with the aggrandizing headline "4-H Clubs Open Units In Ghettos to Teach Kids How to 'Survive,'" for example, opened with the story of a young black 4-H member. "Ollie Saunders hardly fits the stereotype of a 4-H Club member. He is 11 years old, black and lives with his mother and three brothers in a two-room apartment near Cleveland's rundown Hough section. Yet[,] every Saturday Ollie attends the meetings of the Eager Beaver 4-H Club in a community center near his home."[144] Here, Ollie Saunders's race, as well as his family structure and place of residence, is used to demarcate the agency's transformation. A few lines down, however, the article goes on to highlight what we can regard as a gendered continuity in the urban programs. "Almost 60% of city 4-H club members are girls. […] The club teaches them basic housekeeping skills plus such 'survival' courses as how to use food stamps, feed six people nutritiously on $20 a week and obtain a good credit rating."[145] Earlier we saw how 4-H used homemaking classes to introduce ideas like *agrarian futurism* into rural families and communities; here, equally gendered programs are portrayed as *survival programs*. While there are tremendous stylistic changes in the narrative — a rural (and white) community transformed through the teaching of virtues versus an urban (and black) community improved through *survival* strategies — the continuity of technocratic expertise reaching into and improving communities remained.

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[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] McLaughlin, Leanne, "4-H Clubs Open Units In Ghettos to Teach Kids How to 'Survive,'" *Wall Street Journal*, July 28, 1970.
[145] Ibid.

Simultaneously, the differences that the agency as well as the media portrayal formulate speak to how people and spaces are imagined and constructed in disparate, if not opposing ways. And it is these differences that served to alleviate the need and urgency for 4-H's intervention to the public eye. For one, urban, black, and poor spaces were commonly referred to as *slums* or *ghettos*, that required aforementioned *survival strategies* in order to cope with their various dangers. Furthermore, family structures, alcohol and drug use, as well as sexual conduct were frequent tropes that worked to underline the distinctions and serve to *other* these spaces. The Wall Street Journal cites one 4-H leader in Camden, NJ, who reports "I saw a seven-year-old boy, whose only diversion was smoking marijuana on the street corner, join our Clover Buds pre-4-H program for younger children and become enthusiastic about nutrition, instead of drugs […]. Now when his parents fight and send him out alone on the street, he knows he can come to the club and talk to an understanding adult. However small, that's progress."[146] Allusions to seminars on drugs, alcohol, and sex in other urban 4-H clubs underlined the prevalence of these issues and further highlighted these urban, poor, and black communities as needing to be intervened in and reformed. "4-H is just one of many youth groups that have taken up residence in poor city neighborhoods in recent years," the article affirmed. However, this effort, so the argument continued, needed to be undertaken in an effective way and should, thus, come from a government agency. "For one thing [the 4-H] program is financed through local county governments and the Department of Agriculture and staffed by workers on the payrolls of local land[-]grant colleges. This backing makes it possible for 4-H to have professional staff, instead of depending on volunteers."[147] It is interesting that the agency's structure of professionally trained staff served to make a point about 4-H's exceptional position. When we take a closer look at the urban agriculture program, the juxtaposition between professional and volunteer staff becomes much more murky. Indeed, while 4-H made strong arguments for their presence in urban and poor areas, they were skating on thin ice. Critics were quick to argue that the programs offered were actually increasing government dependence, "teaching a whole new generation […] how to live on welfare and like it." 4-H agents refuted this, pointing out that they encouraged youth to start their own programs, thus inspiring poor communities to become proactive rather than dependent. Furthermore, as one agent put it, their programs serve to "stabilize" home lives, which will then enable participants to work to improve their future prospects. In this way, the agency's

[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.

engagement worked to expand the government's reach into poor and black communities while simultaneously amplifying and spreading the message of individual responsibility.

While 4-H had always been a youth organization, its engagement went far beyond targeting and engaging with young people. Nina Mackert has shown that the *delinquency scare* not only framed youth as a societal resource but, beyond that, addressed the conduct of adults as central fields of concern of social order in the post-war era.[148] Problematizing the conduct of inner-city youth justified and alleviated the efforts of 4-H and the agents of the Extension Service that were assembling and conducting many of the urban programs. In many ways, the urbanization of the agency revisited its early days of paving the way for agrarian industrialization through youth engagement in the way that the goals and strategies of 4-H aimed at the transformation of the families of youth and the larger communities surrounding them. The increasing urban engagement came at a time when riots in many U.S. cities in the late 1960s had signaled to the government that in spite of the legislative reactions to the Civil Rights Movement, it was increasingly losing control of urban and black communities. In Michigan, 4-H's move into cities was supported by the local Civil Rights Task Force. By 1972, counties had developed Affirmative Action plans for each of the different program areas.[149] It took several years to set up new centers and programs across the state, but once they were in place, urban and black youth enrollment skyrocketed. As Assistant Administrator of 4-H-Youth in Michigan, E. Dean Vaughan, noted in 1977: "It is impressive to note that Wayne Co. [sic!] had +1600 youth in 4-H, virtually all white, about four years ago. They now have +8000 of which +4500 are black, inner city youth."[150] To the agency, the increase in black participation certainly constituted a success. The internal framework guiding this development problematized the social environment of youth, interpreting their conduct as a symptom of the larger black and poor communities in inner cities. 4-H outlined their work as addressing "the problem … for youths raised in low income high crime areas [sic!]" by engaging "in a battle for young minds." At this time, 95 percent of participants in Detroit's 4-H programs were black. 47 percent lived in a two-parent household, 48.2 percent lived in single-parent households, and the remaining 4.8 percent lived in "other" situations. The education levels of participant's parents were low, with 31.1 percent high-school graduates and only 3.3 percent college

[148] Nina Mackert, *Jugenddelinquenz. Die Produktivität eines Problems in den USA der späten 1940er bis 1960er Jahre* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014), 8.
[149] Cooperative Extension Service, MI: "Plan of Work, 1981-82" in: Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.
[150] E. Dean Vaughan, Assistant Administrator, 4-H-Youth, letter to Joel Soobitsky, Program leader, 4-H (June 29, 1977) in: Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.

graduates. Extension researchers asserted that at the heart of the issue lay multifaceted deviations from middle-class norms, determining that "these youths are socialized more outside the home than middle class youths," and that "[t]heir information environment, outside the home is full of asocial information." Unfortunately, the reports do not specify what constituted *asocial information* to them. However, they did attest, that this socialization prevented youth from obtaining "the necessary information relative to how to succeed in the larger society,"[151] arguing that the necessary role models for social mobility were lacking. 4-H aimed to address and change this. While the agency administered the youth programs, most of them were executed by volunteer leaders that had received training from the extension agents and 4-H staff. The education levels of the volunteer leaders differed significantly from those of participants' parents, with 80 percent having graduated high school and 20 percent having obtained a college degree. All of the volunteer leaders were black, and women were overrepresented as two thirds of volunteers were female.[152] This structure suggests that the agency pooled those members of the community that had some educational accomplishments around youth work. In the assessment reports, the 4-H agents considered the Detroit youth club work a success because members "[e]xhibited less asocial behavior than children not involved with this program." Parents stated that they "perceive[d] a positive change in their children's choice of friends" and overall, a "significant reduction in juvenile offenses" was noticeable. However, the lack of parental involvement in 4-H activities constituted a particular concern, as they found that "[o]f those parents involved with children in the 4-H program, greater communication and understanding existed between child and parents. However, this program seems to have failed to obtain significant parental involvement."[153] Interestingly, adults who did not have children of their own were particularly attracted to engaging in volunteer work in the youth clubs. This suggests that while the agency seemed to be struggling to expand its reach into poor and black families, they did manage to engage community members of different age groups. Yet, as 4-H was to large degree concerned with reforming family structures, the efforts to increase parental involvement were amplified in the following years.[154]

What are we to make of these diverging stories of technocratic, governmental intervention that painted participants in such bleak colors, and participants' enthusiasm to grow and share food with neighbors in need? I have concluded that when communities came together

[151] "4H Impact Evaluation: The Detroit 4-H Program," Final Report (Oct. 1976), in: Records of the Extension Service, Records Relating to 4-H Urban Programs, Box 1, National Archives and Records Administration.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.

to share resources and care for those who were unable to grow their own food, they built moments of solidarity that went beyond the institutional objectives of saving on food costs. In these moments, participants expressed their own moral agency in ways that the institutional framework could not measure in statistics. They formed a local culture of solidarity that used urban agriculture as a place-making as well as a community-building practice and went beyond the objectives of technocratic intervention.

The Limits of Government Intervention

While American cities like Boston, San Francisco, or New York City experienced some relief during the Reagan years, Detroit remained stuck in the iron grip of political corruption, structural and fiscal disintegration, and organized crime. Starting in the 1970s, immigration from Asia and Latin America transformed the racial make-up of urban centers and helped revitalize local economies during the following years. The growing Yuppie market segment saw family size shrinking, decreasing the significance of school districts, and increasingly flocked to fill white-collar positions in central cities. The service sector, especially finance, insurance, and real-estate businesses, helped carry redevelopment and gentrification, while decaying industrial hubs fell further behind.[155] Detroit, for example, had barely escaped bankruptcy in the mid-1970s and was home to some 62,000 abandoned dwelling units.[156] For the post-automation urban underclass that Jimmy Boggs had envisioned as "outsiders" who could obtain no valued place in society, some of these dwellings became home. Other buildings sustained lives and substance dependencies with their steady supply of copper wires to be scrapped and sold; yet others simply served the purposes of entertainment by burning when set afire.[157] When urban observers eagerly declared a resurrection of America's cities in the late-1970s, Detroiters were reconfiguring which parts of their city held what value, which house

[155] Cf. Jon C. Teaford, *The Metropolitan Revolution. The Rise of Post-Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006),168, 175.
[156] Cf. Teaford, 133, 138.
[157] In the mid-1980s, arson parties became a local phenomenon whose popularity soared during Halloween — *Devil's Night*. In 1984, over a three-day period, some 800 fires lit up the Detroit sky; two years later, in spite of massive police presence, almost 400 houses were set on fire. Astonishingly, the city managed to "re-brand" the period around Halloween as Angel's Night in 1995. Since then, thousands of volunteers patrol neighborhoods, which has effectively curbed arson during this period. Nonetheless, in 2008 alone, Detroit reported some 90,000 fires. Cf. Ze'ev Chafets, "The battle lines are clear and dangerous: White suburbs vs. the black city," in *The New York Times* (Jul 29, 1990); Ze'ev Chafets, *Devil's Night and Other True Tales* (New York: Random House, 1990). Mark Binelly, *Detroit City is the Place to Be. The Afterlife of an American Metropolis* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012), 4, 8.

could be set ablaze — perhaps for an insurance pay-out? — and which house could turn a profit as a business in the growing informal economy. These were certainly not the kinds of critical engagements with value that the Boggses longed for in their philosophical writings but help understand the context in which these discussions took place. When Grace Lee and Jimmy Boggs wondered about the future of Detroit's underclass and called for a "Search for Human Identity" that would build on collaboration as a new step in human social evolution, they were doing so coming from a place that saw built structures as well as family structures disintegrating on a city-wide level.[158]

Beginning in the Nixon era, two larger transformations deeply shaped the urban environment of Detroit. Both the rise of the narcotics economy and the metamorphosis of the welfare system affected families and the ways in which people related to their environment. Starting in the second half of the 1970s, heroin trafficking became a rare economic opportunity in the city. It was quickly taken up by an organization called "Young Boys, Incorporated" (YBI), a youth gang that professionalized the trade. Making use of a Michigan law that severely restricted jail terms for youth under the age of 19, YBI relied on minors to carry out the business while leaders of the organization remained largely shielded from prosecution for many years. A good decade before media and social activists decried the so-called *school-to-gang pipeline* that directed black (male) youth away from academic qualifications and toward a life governed by gangs and the criminal justice system, YBI established an organizational structure that was professional, resilient to law-enforcement, and highly profitable. Unsurprisingly, the system spread throughout the nation and shaped the drug economy long after YBI dwindled in the early 1980s. In Detroit, too, the system lived on and reflourished with the onset of the *Crack Epidemic* in the first half of the 1980s.[159] This particular phenomenon yielded another innovation rooted deeply in Detroit's history, this time introducing the economically driven mobility of poor and southern blacks to the trade. With the Chambers Brothers, a family from the Arkansas Delta, the informal economy was taken over by minors who were unfamiliar with the local turf, loyal and reliant on the gang's structure, and driven by hope for economic security. The city's disappearing social structure facilitated the family's rapid rise, with young associates installing Crack Houses across the city, many of which soon featured in the Chambers Brothers' expanding real-estate portfolio. While scholars as well as the Drug

[158] Cf. James Boggs, "Our Search for Human Identity" speech (New Haven: Yale, 1974), in James and Grace Lee Boggs Collection Box 6, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[159] While media coverage of crack cocaine soared in the mid-1980s, the substance was already being traded in urban areas at the beginning of the decade.

Enforcement Agency (DEA) "attributed the rise of the crack economy to the collapse of the city's internal social structure, primarily the massive loss of jobs,"[160] one must also consider the properties of the substance to understand the larger implications of the changing narcotics economy on urban ecologies. Heroin differs greatly from crack cocaine: It is usually taken intravenously and causes users to experience intensive physical and mental euphoria, often compared to reliving one's time in the womb. Consumption is relatively labor-intensive and usually conducted away from prying eyes, and the effects can last several hours, necessitating a somewhat protected environment. As an opiate, heroin has a physically dulling, pain-relieving effect, with users often falling asleep before they can reach the point of overconsumption. Crack, on the other hand, is a physical stimulant. It is most commonly smoked, usually repeatedly, and causes many of the same symptoms associated with powder cocaine.[161] Economically, crack cocaine can be sold more frequently because of these different consumption patterns, but also because the potency is higher than in powder cocaine, making it possible to sell smaller doses at lower prices, which is convenient for low-economic-background consumers. The urban ecology of crack is accommodated by places like Detroit that have a high rate of unoccupied, dilapidated housing. Merchants and consumers can band together there, often mixing-and-matching different forms of drug-related criminal activity. For Detroit, this alternative economic sector was a logical next step in the post-Fordist direction, providing opportunities for youth to earn wages and showing highly developed, professional organizational structures.

Often, these youth were the male bread-winners in their families. Beginning with the transformation of the welfare system in the 1970s (foreshadowing what would happen following the escalating welfare cut-backs in the Reagan and Clinton years) the structures of black, inner-city families were changing. Rising rates of divorce and non-marital childbearing, the spread of low-paying service sector jobs, and a welfare system designed for two-parent families and showing little regard for single mothers' childcare or job-training needs, as well as the growing attacks by corporate-funded think tanks and scholars on the premiere welfare program for poor families — Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) — contributed to what scholars often refer to as the "feminization of welfare."[162] By the 1980s, conservative

[160] Paul J. Draus, "Substance Abuse and Slow-Motion Disasters: The Case of Detroit," *The Sociological Quarterly* 50, Issue 2 (2009), 360-382.
[161] Meaning high self-confidence, loss of appetite, alertness, and insomnia. This is unsurprising, since the two substances are chemically very similar. Consumers smoke small, solid "rocks," that make a crackling noise, hence the name.
[162] Cf. Nadasen, 59.

attacks had revamped the "culture of poverty" discourse that pathologized poor and black people, especially women,[163] and calls for "punitive welfare reform as a way to revive the work ethic, the two-parent family, and the nation's economic supremacy" became predominant enough to allow little dissent even amongst liberal politicians.[164] Reagan's shift from "the war on poverty to the war on welfare," as Michael Katz called it, that accompanied the new maxims of corporate tax breaks, balanced budgets, and urban economic growth policies, which often enough subsidized the haves at the cost of the have-nots, was mirrored by the Democrats' abandonment of antipoverty policies. By the time Bill Clinton eliminated AFDC altogether in 1996, his party had been prioritizing full employment over guaranteed income legislation, thus co-carrying the notion of the "undeserving poor" into the 21st century.[165]

As the decimation of welfare was carried out on the backs of poor, single-parent families of color, the small-government rhetoric of Reagan betrayed his administration's efforts to police economically underprivileged, urban, black, and male bodies. While the country at large regarded government intervention, "big-government," with increasing disdain and welfare came to signify an entitlement, drug-related crime became the new organizational tool to reform urban governance across the country.[166] After a brief lull under Ford and Carter, Reagan's "War on Drugs" transported the framing of narcotics as "a biopolitical threat to the health of both individual bodies and the overall social body"[167] into the 1980s, with the 1984 Comprehensive Crime Control Act (CCCA) institutionalizing new measures like minimum sentencing guidelines and police strategies that increasingly targeted particular minority populations rather than pursuing larger distributors.[168] The 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act even mandated a "one-strike rule" for public housing residents, allowing for a form of kin liability that sent ripple effects throughout family structures.[169] Sociologist Markus Kienscherf asserts that an increasingly paramilitary police force waged a "low-intensity war" on American inner-city streets that "marked a transposition of Third World-style low-intensity conflicts into the cities of the first world, or rather into what came to be construed as pockets of the Third World

[163] Most famously, Ronald Reagan helped disseminate and cement the notion of the "Welfare Queen," a black, urban, female who prefers to live on benefits rather than, in Reagan's vision, "making the proverbial effort" to find wage labor.
[164] Cf. Nadasen, 64.
[165] Cf. Ibid., 63-66.
[166] Cf. Markus Kienscherf, *US Domestic and International Regimes of Security. Pacifying the Globe, Securing the Homeland* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 62.
[167] Ibid., 64.
[168] Ibid., 67f.
[169] Ibid., 68.

within major US cities."[170] According to Kienscherf, authoritarian risk management measures vis-à-vis these populations became normalized and crime became a "metaphor to make other fields of government intervention (such as the economy) intelligible, and to legitimize intervention in these fields."[171] Detroit's streets, while neglected by city services, became hotspots for government intervention by policing. This didn't seem to affect staggering crime rates. The city's urban environment became more hostile and with the 1980s coming to a close, there was little hope for relief.

James and Grace Lee Boggs closely observed these transformations and tried to intervene in them through the various political groups they were involved with. "Keeping an ear on the ground" meant that the Boggses kept close contact with citizen groups as well as individual activists across the city and beyond. What they learned from these sources as well as their own observations became topics in the regular discussion session they led with core allies, which in turn shaped their regular commentaries in local media, political events, and academic formats they participated in. These activities are well-documented in the James and Grace Lee Boggs Collection at the Walter P. Reuther Archives in Detroit. Meticulous discussion protocols shed light on their discursive methodology and help illuminate the values that drove the progressivism of the Boggses and their constituency. In the late 1980s, the local media narrative of Detroit's urban crisis had shifted from musings about a possible "come back" of the city to attesting its economic, political, and social "breakdown."[172] "Dying in Detroit today ain't no big thing," observed the group surrounding the Boggses. "I see Detroit dying before my eyes. It isn't just the buildings falling down; it is the people [...] falling apart."[173] In this situation, they further contended, "we can't rely on institutions" and decried the "rottenness of our values," revealing that in spite of their awareness of the larger structural economic transformations, these activists nonetheless saw normative failings as at least one causal dimension of the crisis that they felt needed to be corrected. "The average kid out there doesn't give a damn about Community [sic!]. A change is required in the quality of the people themselves,"[174] argued James Boggs in one meeting. His terminology reveals a contradiction between the group's principal self-conception and the decidedly elitist elements of thought that

[170] Ibid., 69.
[171] Ibid., 71.
[172] "What would make things better today in Detroit?", discussion protocol, (22. Jan., 1988) in James and Grace Lee Boggs Collection Box 6, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[173] Ibid.
[174] "Rebuilding our human identity; saving peoples souls/dignity?", Discussion protocol, (2 Feb., 1988) in James and Grace Lee Boggs Collection Box 6, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

underlay their activism. This put them in line with paternalistic currents in the history of progressive reformism.[175] It also directed the group's engagement with urban agriculture, which became not only a practice used to re-build the presence of Detroiters in public spaces but also, more importantly, sought to educate participants and (re-)instill political notions of community resilience as a normative value. How can we understand this tension between bottom-up activism and elitist elements of thought? The following section uses the Boggses' philosophical, political, and environmental activism to understand how urban agriculture became the basis of urbanity for the 21st century.

[175] Simultaneously, they demonstrate the power of zeitgeist over their thinking. When we consider the current state of research on substance abuse, for example, the insight that addiction is a health issue is currently reshaping this field and providing a direly needed move away from blaming individual "qualities" or failings for addiction, which have served to vilify and punish people suffering from addiction for too long.

V. City of Hope: Citizen Intervention (1988-2008)

Citizen Intervention

This chapter traces the grassroots history of urban agriculture in Detroit. While individuals and groups had long bonded across the city over shared spaces and interests, these social connections were put to the test when government programs were slashed in 1992 and 1994. In the late 1980s, a group of black, mostly female elders became known as the *Gardening Angels*. Their multigenerational community gardening efforts spread across the city, inspiring James and Grace Lee Boggs to take on urban agriculture as political, reformist practice. One central point of inquiry in this chapter is how different citizen and activist groups approached the urban crisis in their immediate neighborhoods: How did environmental engagement affect local social, political, and cultural practices? What tensions arose from such changes? Did citizen-led efforts transform urban agricultural practices that had been shaped by two decades of government programs? The case studies demonstrate the resilience of Detroiters in dealing with their social, urban environments and highlight how private citizens used crop production to intervene in the urban crisis. I use the example of the *Gardening Angels* to introduce larger philosophical and political transformations driven by activists Grace Lee and James Boggs along with their constituents. I argue that citizen intervention changed Detroit's sociocultural practices because it integrated the personal histories of black elderly women into the everyday practices of younger generations, by passing on cultural values of place making in ways that conveyed a sense of care, responsibility, and deep connection to spaces that youth had hitherto perceived as threatening. Within the urban-crisis context, I interpret these spatial interventions as acts of citizenship that lay claim to *and* establish a culture of care for urban land. Subsequent networks like the Detroit-Agriculture-Network (DAN) and contemporary re-appropriations of urban agriculture have emerged from these cultural-environmental engagements, as we see at the end of this chapter and the subsequent outlook.

The *Gardening Angels*

Lillian Clark had always gardened. Born in 1920 in Flat Lick, Kentucky, tending to a vegetable garden was as much part of family life as sharing the meals that Clark's mother created from the okras, collard greens, sweet potatoes, peanuts, corn, tomatoes, peas, cabbages, lettuces, and sugarcanes they grew. Her father worked as a coal miner, bringing home just enough to sustain the simple life the parents and their seven children led. Life was not easy, nor did the future

look particularly secure, but they always had enough food on the table to enjoy over lively conversation and banter. To Lillian, "working the land imparted a deep sense of accomplishment" and created a love for the land and the region that persisted throughout her life.[1] She did exceptionally well at school and graduated top of her class, then went on to follow in her mother's footsteps and became a homemaker. Like many black and southern women, she learned everything she knew from her mother: "[S]ewing, gardening, canning, everything […] [w]e learned from her. She did everything and we watched."[2] Such diverse home-making skills helped families keep the budget low and cope with low wages. For many who later migrated north, such traditional family structures were not possible due to high rents and a lack of garden spaces and networks, which resulted in higher overall expenses. Clark's differs from these stories in that she and her husband settled into the black middle class relatively quickly after their migration to Detroit. In Kentucky, Lillian's husband had become a minster and worked in the railroad industry, which had made for a modest life. Hardships and limited opportunities under Jim Crow racism brought the small family to hope for an easier and safer life elsewhere. In 1943, when their daughter was just two years old, they decided to follow the millions of blacks who migrated north in search for a better life. Lillian's husband secured a job at Uniroyal in Detroit and the family moved into a small apartment on Joseph Campau, right in the center of the city, where they stayed until they found a house on the east side of Detroit.[3] Over the years, life for the Clark family did improve. Lillian did not have to pursue wage labor outside the home and started to take part in volunteer work, joining a number of African American women's clubs that enriched the social life of the city. She also enjoyed spending her time making elaborate quilts, a practice that had been passed down to her over generations. For many black families, quilting and other crafts provided a way to maintain not just family traditions but also a deep connection to the places where those traditions originated. Even as Detroit became home, an intimate bond to their southern roots nonetheless remained of importance to migrant families like the Clarks, for whom annual vacations in Kentucky "became a yearly ritual. […] 'Every year we went back except in '59. We went back every year. We was going on the train and then we got a car. We would then drive every year.'"[4] As for so many other black and female migrants, gardening continued to play an important role in Lillian Clark's life throughout these years. The plants required her attention and care, and in

[1] Lisa Krissoff Boehm, *Making a Way out of No Way. African American Women and the Second Great Migration* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 2009), 41.
[2] Ibid., 48.
[3] Ibid, 96, 123.
[4] Lillian Clark quoted in ibid., 222.

turn rewarded her for it year after year with beautiful flowers and plentiful harvests that she turned into meals for family and friends. While the Clarks enjoyed the comforts of a middle-class lifestyle, many Detroiters who came to the city during the Great Migration relied on their vegetable gardens to keep household expenses low and gain access to high-quality produce that was hardly accessible or affordable otherwise.

Coincidentally, in the late 1980s, when Lillian Clark was well into her 60s, these years of dedication found new room to expand into. Surpassing the privacy of her backyard, her vegetable and flower beds soon became part of something much larger. It all began with an adjacent house that had stood empty for a while. The lack of human care had become visible, decay had set in, and as with so many other houses across the city, it was slated for demolition. Another typical page out of the Detroit playbook for dealing with its urban crisis. Lillian Clark knew as well as any other Detroiter what would happen next: After demolition came the weeds, then the trash, and that would be it. Not this time, though. "I didn't want a lot like that next door to me,"[5] Lillian said. Having run out of space in her own garden, this lot seemed to provide an opportunity to branch out and she began to tend to the land as she had learned to when she was a small child in Kentucky.[6] And soon, something extraordinary happened: "Upon seeing this formerly 'blighted' vacant lot transformed into gardens of 'green beans, corn, peas, tomatoes, celery, okra, lettuce, geraniums, and more than 30 kinds of roses,' others in her east side neighborhood offered help tending the garden."[7] The diversity of burgeoning plants and crops provided a powerful visual contrast to the usual sight of such spaces where weeds grew indiscriminately over discarded tires and mattresses, broken glass, and dead cats. Lillian purchased the lot through Detroit's *Farm-A-Lot* program, taking a further step in the transformation of a derelict property into a community garden.[8] Decay and abandonment were soon being replaced with colorful life. The attentive care of Lillian Clark, who now worked in plain sight and unobstructed by fences, made neighbors curious, astonished, and soon enough, motivated to follow in her footsteps. Several members of Clark's congregation also joined in and the church became a structural basis for the urban gardening group that was forming. The *Gardening Angels*,[9] as they became known, were mostly elderly and black women who had

[5] Quoted in Marty Hair, "Gardens of Goodwill," *Detroit Free Press,* August 23, 1996, 8F.
[6] Cf. Jim Stone, "Gardening Angels: Detroit senior citizens show how inner-city agriculture can strengthen ties between generations," *In Context*, 42 (Fall 1995), 28, online: https://www.context.org/iclib/ic42/stone/ (accessed 12. June, 2019).
[7] Joseph Stanhope Cialdella, *Gardens in the Machine. Cultural and Environmental Change in Detroit, 1879 – 2010*." (PhD diss., unpublished, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2015), 298.
[8] Cf. Betty DeRamus, "His flower power branched out to empower struggling city neighborhoods," *Detroit News* (July 10, 2001), E1.
[9] Joseph Cialdella notes that "[a]ccording to Marty Hair, the group "got their name from their religious devotion

preserved their Southern roots and agricultural heritage in private gardens they maintained throughout the decades they had spent in Detroit.[10] Now these private endeavors expanded into the public realm of vacant lots and the elderly members used their seasoned gardening experiences to form intergenerational practices. Members would involve their grandchildren in gardening work, effectively offering free and educational childcare as they passed on their knowledges about plant cultivation. Friends of these children often joined in and "[m]any of the Gardening Angels […] set up 'grannie porches' where grandchildren and their friends in the neighborhood [could] gather in safety. Rather than the elders telling the young children what to do and what not to do, they [took] on the serenity of their gardens and listen[ed] to the children."[11] In the face of the urban crisis, these gardens became literal safe spaces from decay and violence, as well as sites for intergenerational community building, offering companionship to both children and the elderly. "The common unity behind winter planning, spring planting, summer tending, fall harvesting, canning, and composting brings people together. Isolation is broken. Our best human qualities emerge. Excess food is divided up among neighbors. Food pantries for people in institutions and homeless shelters are re-stocked."[12] By the mid-1990s, the *Gardening Angels* had managed to engage some 500 people in over 150 gardens across the city (many of them located on the east side).[13]

The perseverance and longevity of this community group that existed well into the early 2000s[14] was also based in the extraordinary efforts of core members. One such member was Gerald Hairston. Like many of the *Gardening Angels* who had come to Detroit in the 1950s and 60s to work in the auto industry, he had brought his passion for and knowledge about land cultivation with him from the South.[15] What set Hairston apart from other members of the group was his extraordinary energy for helping others in their gardening endeavors. Karl Steyaert, who conducted research on urban agriculture in Detroit in the late 1990s, described Hairston as "an African-American man in his fifties, with the intensity of a man half his age. During the growing season, Gerald can usually be seen working long days in gardens all around the city, wearing a t-shirt and shorts, and with a large straw hat on his head to protect him from the

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and because an early community garden on Belvidere had a planting in the shape of the cross, as well as prayer and tribute gardens." Marty Hair, "Gerald Hairston: Urban Gardener was a Visionary," *Detroit Free Press*, July 2, 2001.

[10] Cf. Cialdella, 298.

[11] Cf. Stone, 28.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] The group seems to have disbanded after the death of Gerald Hairston in June 2001.

[15] Cf. Parks & People Foundation, "Neighborhood open space management: A report on greening strategies in Baltimore and six other cities," (Baltimore, Spring 2000).

sun."[16] As a certified Master Gardener, Hairston had also expanded on his previous crop cultivation knowledge, and worked in numerous gardens of varying sizes to pass on his knowledge to others. This knowledge went beyond the ins and outs of crop cultivation and stretched into the institutional game, as Hairston was also knowledgeable in acquiring resources from *Farm-A-Lot* and *Growing Roots*. Until the programs were axed, Hairston made sure that the *Gardening Angels*' sites were rototilled through the *Farm-A-Lot* program and that members got their seed packages.[17] Like the other *Gardening Angels*, Hairston cultivated an intergenerational approach to urban crop cultivation. He became a regular at the 4-H center on McClellan as well as at an astonishing diversity of gardening projects all over the city: "neighborhood gardens, youth gardens, church gardens, school gardens, hospital gardens, senior independence gardens, wellness gardens, Hope Takes Root gardens, Kwanzaa gardens"[18] all strived thanks to his skillful help and knowledge. The breadth and diversity of these projects reveal the sociocultural and environmental diversity that was flourishing in Detroit. All over the city, spaces became places of expressing shared identities, as folks tended to different crops, cared for their well-being, and eventually turned them into food that was shared in communal meals and given away to those who needed it. Bonds formed over time between gardeners and their communities, as people exchanged experiences and joy over their endeavors. These connections also formed between caretakers and their edible crops and perennial flowers, with the former transforming and maintaining suitable environments and the latter providing sustenance for bodies, as well as a source of beauty and challenge for their minds. 69-year-old *Gardening Angel* Annie Brown put it like this: "As I sing and talk to my plants and flowers, I realize that there are things in life that we don't want that we have to do anyway. When I look at my garden I see that I am in charge! I have the final say as to what happens and what doesn't."[19] Tending to plants carries a tangible sense of responsibility, as the results of good or negligent care become quickly visible. Once one sees growth and the constant transformations that unfold in these plants, and realizes the importance of one's role in this spectacle; tending to plants, edible or otherwise, becomes a deeply personal and truly rewarding experience. The value of these urban gardens in Detroit at this specific moment in the city's

[16] Karl M. Steyaert, *From Motor City to Garden City. Sustainability and Urban Agriculture in Detroit,* (Master's thesis, unpublished, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2001), 19.
[17] Cf. Cialdella, 299.
[18] Grace Lee Boggs, "One thing leads to another: Cooperative development in urban communities," in: *Schrumpfende Städte* (Ein Initiativprojekt der Kulturstiftung des Bundes in Kooperation mit dem Projektbüro Philipp Oswalt, der Galerie für Zeitgenssische Kunst Leipzig, der Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau und der Zeitschrift archplus.): "Detroit III.1, Studies Part 1" March 2004 (unpublished).
[19] Stone, "Gardening Angels…," 28.

history goes beyond the undoubtedly meaningful production of food. It is also deeply embedded in these cultures of mutual care.

The impact of Hairston's activity deeply challenged notions of value that the urban crisis superimposed on Detroit land and its inhabitants. The socioeconomic dimension of his efforts showed noteworthy monetary outcomes, as in one particular school project he was involved in. Thanks to his help this school garden yielded enough fresh produce for 1,100 bottles of local salsa, processed by thirteen children in three days, that brought in $4,400 for the project.[20] However, Hairston himself did not seem to measure his efforts in fiscal terms. In fact, Hairston was driven by a deep belief in other forms of value. Steyaert notes that he conducted all his garden work as a volunteer and only derived minimal financial support in the form of a "modest stipend from a local church."[21] Hairston explained that "[s]ome of us think that money, materialism are important. I think the spirit is important. Learning and sharing with these seniors. You can't put a price on it… It depends on what you think is bankable. Money, I've had my share, and that wasn't the answer."[22] Values like communal experiencing and learning to him seem to have trumped material interests, and in a way Hairston's personal reflections speak to the history of the place Detroit. When he comments on having had "his share" of economic success, which "wasn't the answer," his experiences mirror the fragility and temporality of economic wealth that was so fundamentally demonstrated by the economic downturn that followed the city's boom years. Perhaps experiencing this structural downturn led him to reflect on questions about different forms of value on a more personal level. Witnessing the exclusion of large parts of the black community from material wealth and the effects this had on them, might have led Hairston to engage with the urban environment in a way that centered on exchanging experiences and knowledges, and using this to build a culture of resilience. Hairston also critiqued the "throw-away lifestyles" that characterized the capitalist consumption society and expressed concern over the "increasing ecological instability of the highly specialized food production of agribusiness."[23] The volatility of Detroit's industrial production is mirrored here in the ecological volatility of agricultural monocrop production. To Hairston, revitalizing local, and socially as well as ecologically diverse, agricultural production, provided a stepping stone for social transformation.[24] In this way, he demonstrated parallels between the social and ecological environments of places like

[20] Cf. Steyaert, 19.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Gerald Hairston quoted in Steyaert, 19.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

Detroit and revealed their interconnectedness, informing each other, if not constituting two dimensions of the same timeline.

Within these interconnections between space, crisis, and people we can find the political dimension of urban gardening. Philosopher and activist Grace Lee Boggs notes how Hairston, like others, contextualized Detroit's decline within larger economic transformations as well as his own biographical experience: one that he shared with so many other blacks that had once gone north in hopes for a brighter future; "Born in the South, growing up on the Eastside of Detroit, and having worked in the factory, Gerald […] knew that we were suffering the agonies of a dying industrial society where caring for each other and the Earth would be a priority."[25] Hairston built on his skepticism toward urban spaces as mere generators of monetary value and pursued ways to link urban agricultural production to the historical struggles of black farmers. He developed "close ties with the national and local Black Farmers movement[26] which spreads the good news that 'we cannot free ourselves until we feed ourselves,' i.e., it is only when we can provide for our own basic needs that we are empowered to make our own choices."[27] Boggs's enthusiastic words reflect the sprouting seeds of the idea that urban agriculture could be a political practice that springs from the bottom up and empowers practitioners, rather than advocating the top-down approach to socially and culturally engineering desired values and behaviors, which had dominated previous urban agricultural projects. As we see below, the notion of urban gardens as places of connecting identities to historic experiences and political visions would become a major driving force in Detroit over the following years.

The *Gardening Angels* generated these new, interconnected, and grassroots-driven approaches to intervening in social and environmental decay. One of the most important aspects was the intergenerational approach of engaging with derelict spaces. Many members of the group expanded their gardening endeavors and not only opened them up to children in their communities but also became involved in the 4-H-administered urban gardening program. The *Gardening Angels* were sometimes even referred to as the *4-H Elders*.[28] One cannot underestimate the material and symbolic strength of decay and abandonment that these overgrown lots, the trash that was dumped on them and the physical dangers they signified, carried for children that grew up around them. Adventurous explorations must have come with

[25] Grace Lee Boggs with Scott Kurashige, "Detroit, Place and Space to Begin Anew," *The Next American Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 117f.
[26] Monica M. White provides an in-depth history of the Black Farmers movement in Monica M. White, *Freedom Farmers. Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 62-87.
[27] Boggs, "One thing…"
[28] Cf. Stone, "Gardening Angels…".

shocking experiences like encountering dead animals or injuring oneself on broken glass. In the face of this, the notion to work with community elders, in many cases grandmothers and other family members, at a young age to turn these spaces into enjoyable, safe environments that offer a myriad of plants and insect life to discover, constitute interwoven reparative, intergenerational, educational, and socio-spatial practices. Juxtaposed with the hopelessness of ongoing decline of Detroit's economy and its material and social effects, the transformation of these spaces into places of community, bonding, and learning provided a sense of agency and empowerment to both children and elders. Experiencing positive change and seeing it as the outcome of one's own efforts as opposed to the passive witnessing of slow and relentless decline, created a strong bond between people and place. This bond finds additional strength in the social web that grew stronger over time. As the *Gardening Angels* continued their work year in and year out, they created permanence, reliability, and stability in the face of decline that sparked physical dangers and mental anxieties. Children spent time with their *Gardening Angels* and got the opportunity to learn from the elders' experiences in growing food and ornamental plants. Together, they practiced care-work and as elders told stories, children learned about family histories, traditions, and practices that had shaped the lives of their ancestors. Over time, these communal interactions created strength, deepening a sense of identity and community, and growing ever-deeper roots of connection, value, and appreciation for Detroit's land. While the activities also provided peace of mind to parents, who were often struggling to find suitable childcare to keep their children off the streets, children learned to care for and love their environments, acquired resilience skills that were deeply entangled with their ancestors' histories, and found pride and strength in their cultural inheritance. Finding such value in past histories enabled a brighter look toward the future. These intergenerational identity-building and place-making practices provided a reparative notion to the historic trauma and pain that many African Americans suffered while forcibly cultivating crops, at the same time as they quite literally repaired the present trauma of decline. These bridges across temporal, historical scales reveal the deeply personal significance of urban agricultural work. In Detroit, these practices had now become a significant means to build edible, material, social, and mental resilience in the face of systemic socioeconomic challenges.

Spatial Intervention

As the 1980s were coming to a close, and the United States, and indeed the world, was approaching a new era — one in which the West's capitalist ideas and system seemed to have prevailed over socialism — Detroit continued to visually epitomize capitalism's illiberal and racially disparate underbelly. Unfortunately, apart from the occasional sensationalist headline, the world was not watching. As the Berlin Wall came down by sheer force of citizen protest, Detroiters were setting houses on fire. Some were keen to collect an insurance payout (since buyers were impossible to find) and some did it simply because they could. And who wouldn't fancy doing something as transgressive as setting a house on fire? After all, arson had become so normalized, the police and fire departments so understaffed and overworked, that serious legal or even financial ramifications were highly unlikely to occur. In 1984, Detroit had earned the distinction of "arson capital," when some 800 fires were set during the three-day period around Halloween alone, with thousands more structures set ablaze during the rest of the year. During these tumultuous years, urban agriculture in Detroit transformed. It began with the *Gardening Angels*, who inspired the politicization that still characterizes parts of the urban agriculture community in Detroit today. Considering that the *Gardening Angels* themselves did not identify as a political group, even if Gerald Hairston's opinions did reflect a prominent presence of political thinking behind his actions, we must turn to the emergence of other urban agricultural actors in Detroit in order to understand how politicized notions of the practice spread. Looking back from today's perspective, we may characterize the *Gardening Angels* as a missing link between the state-sponsored programs that effectively were an attempt to simply manage urban decline, and the grassroots emergence that has been using urban agriculture as a means to combat food insecurity as well as transmit political, capitalist-critical notions of communal urbanity beyond their garden or farm spaces.

What inspires people to engage in urban agriculture? In the last chapter, we saw how institutional frameworks can organize and direct urban agricultural activity ranging from individual or family gardens to large-scale community projects. While providing information and practical and material support is vital in driving the expansion of the practice, these institutional frameworks often built on the practices of individuals and groups that existed before them or continue their work after the institutional programs end. This chapter looks at the private initiatives that engaged in urban agriculture, the political and philosophical ideas that drove these engagements, and the development of an informal city-wide network following the end of the municipal and federal programs. The history of urban agriculture in Detroit often

provides us with narratives that run against the grain of larger, (inter)national, historical developments.[29] During a time when the city administration and the federal government were — for one reason or another — withdrawing, urban agriculture spread through their own institutions. In the mid-1980s, as we saw, the city took another recession-induced economic blow. Some 42 percent of Detroiters lived in poverty and food insecurity made breadlines swell.[30] Again, the political leadership remained largely helpless, driven by nostalgia for an irrecoverable industrial past, instead of developing a new vision. Perhaps keeping one plant open for a bit longer, updating another in the hopes of holding on to a few more jobs, and spending substantial amounts of taxpayers' money on these ultimately hopeless endeavors. Over the course of my research, Americans as well as Germans would often express astonishment that anyone would live in (or study) a place so "derelict, crime-ridden, and hopeless." Detroit has broadened my perspective and helped me recognize the resilience of people in the face of the volatility of structures and systems I myself have often taken for granted. My time in Detroit has helped me see that a place often deemed empty, dead, or otherwise worthless is in fact home to strong and proud people whom we cloak in invisibility through exactly such evaluations.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, other major American cities like Boston, New York City, or San Francisco had become popular with the growing yuppie market segment. In contrast to the Baby Boomers, this generation engaged in single and urban lifestyles that required smaller apartments and the quality of school districts did not affect their realty decisions. With the yuppies, white-collar jobs in the service industry (especially in finance, insurance, and real-estate) moved into city centers, while blue-collar jobs continued to move to the suburbs, to southern states, or abroad, or were eliminated altogether through automation.[31] Gentrification pushed out many elements that had become associated, if not equated, with the urban crisis. In economic terms, this meant that these inner cities had now "recovered." Urban historian Jon C. Teaford notes that "[u]rban observers were eager to proclaim the supposed resurrection of the central cities"[32] — however, this development certainly was not universal. Former industrial cities like Detroit or Cleveland continued to

[29] We saw this when Detroit's factory gardens took over a government program during the Depression, or when, as opposed to other American cities, victory gardening played a rather insignificant role during World War II.
[30] Cf. Focus: HOPE "Hunger Task Force", "A Note on Changes in Black Racial Attitudes in Detroit, 1968-1976" in Focus: HOPE Collection (Box 7, Folder 26), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.
[31] Cf. Jon C. Teaford, *The Metropolitan Revolution. The Rise of Post-Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 165-168.
[32] Ibid., 165.

decay. Many houses still lay abandoned and became despised nuclei for the latest plot twist in a seemingly never-ending urban crisis: the crack cocaine epidemic.[33] Empty houses became dens for violence and substance abuse, often affecting surrounding neighborhoods. As the city administration increased housing demolition efforts to manage these spaces, the structural violence of the urban crisis became an environmental one. Due to the age of most of Detroit's built structures, with each house that was torn down, more lead was uncaged and released.[34] The results became statistically visible in 2016, when the *Detroit News* reported that 8.8 percent of local children tested showed lead poisoning (in one ZIP code, 22 percent of children were afflicted).[35] Even before such revelations, the hazards of Detroit's environment were becoming omnipresent — invisible to the eye in soils, spectacular in rotting mansions — even as the municipality tried to manage the urban decay. As Detroit was becoming known as a post-industrial wasteland, many of the industries that remained in the area discharged toxic waste in the city, often in the most derelict and deserted areas.[36] Blacks, even as they made up the vast majority of the population, again were disproportionately affected. It's impossible to measure the long-term effects, but we can imagine how cognitive changes and behavioral disorders in Detroit children would put further strains on struggling parents and teachers. At the intersection of race and class in Detroit, environmental activism began to merge with civil rights activism.

[33] While media coverage of crack cocaine only begun in 1985, the substance had been circulating in American cities since the early 1980s. Scholars have argued that the "crack epidemic" was rather a product of a media-fueled moral panic than reflecting of the situation of crack users. Cf. Jimmie L. Reeves and Richard Campbell, *Cracked Coverage. Television News, the Anti-Cocaine Crusade, and the Reagan Legacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

[34] Lead-based paint was banned in 1978. Rob Nixon has described as "calamities" the way that such invisible, slow-working, unspectacular toxins cause *slow violence*. I elaborate on this in the subchapter "Environmental Citizenship," Cf. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor (*New Haven: Harvard University Press, 2011), 6.

[35] Karen Bouffard and Christine MacDonald, "Detroit kids' lead poisoning rates higher than Flint," in *Detroit News* (15 Nov, 2017), online: https://eu.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2017/11/14/lead-poisoning-children-detroit/107683688/ (accessed 14 Jan, 2020).

[36] In 1994, a study conducted by the University of Michigan charged that illegal dumping of toxic waste disproportionately affected Blacks, increasing cancer rates and other fatal diseases. Cf. Ron Seigel, "Conference drafts recommendations to battle environmental racism," *Michigan Citizen* 16:34 (23 Jul, 1994), A1. Robert R. Gioielli offers an in-depth analysis of St. Louis's struggle against widespread lead-poisoning in Robert R. Gioielli, *Environmental Activism and the Urban Crisis: Baltimore, St. Louis, Chicago* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014).

Philosophical Intervention

"I want you - theoreticians or intellectuals or activists - to think about change very personally, in the way that people, for example, have changed in Detroit. In the 1970s and '80s, all you could see were vacant lots. Abandoned houses. Rot. Blight. Then, some African American women who had lived in the South saw these vacant lots as places where you could grow food to meet a basic need. And they didn't see it only in terms of belly hunger. They saw urban kids growing up without a sense of process, without a sense of time. And they thought urban agriculture would be a means for cultural change in young people. That's how the Urban Agricultural Movement developed - out of that reality and the very human needs of people."
- Grace Lee Boggs

By the time James and Grace Lee Boggs heard about the *Gardening Angels* in the late 1980s, they had already dedicated the majority of their lives to political and social activism in Detroit, so fighting for equity and equality was a tremendously personal project. Lately, however, they had reached the end of several culs-de-sac, or so it seemed. Socially, the city seemed to be disintegrating more and more: In 1981, Coleman Young's administration pushed through controversial plans to construct a General Motors (GM) plant in the Poletown neighborhood, displacing one of the last white (and poor) communities left in Detroit. The area was bulldozed in spite of a wave of law suits by residents and some $350 million in municipal, county, and state subsidies contributed to the construction.[37] GM had promised to create 6,000 new jobs in the highly automated plant. However, the Poletown plant ended up only employing some 3,000 workers, while GM simultaneously shut down two other plants in the city, eliminating 10,000 jobs.[38] This and other, similar incidences showed Detroiters that corporate interests took priority over their socioeconomic needs, fueling cynicism and further disenchantment with political leadership (and tellingly inspiring the term *corporate welfare*).[39] Yet another economic crisis took hold of Detroit in 1985, spurring further economic distress and depopulation. By 1990, Detroit was home to just over one million inhabitants, which meant that within four decades, the city had lost half its population and things were not looking up. The crack epidemic governed large parts of Detroit's population through abuse, dependence, and violent crime. Gang membership became a major supplier of wage work, social prestige, and a sense of

[37] Tom Gantert, "A Cautionary Tale About Job Promises and Corporate Subsidies," Michigan Capitol Confidential (18 Dec., 2019), online: https://www.michigancapitolconfidential.com/a-cautionary-tale-about-job-promises-and-corporate-subsidies (Accessed: 6 March, 2020).
[38] Cf. Scott Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion. How the U.S. Political Crisis began in Detroit* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 43f.
[39] Cf. James T. Bennett, "Corporate Welfare as Theft: How Detroit and General Motors Stole Poletown," in James T. Bennett, *Corporate Welfare: Crony Capitalism that Enriches the Rich* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 118-160.

belonging for young Detroiters. The Boggses' political activism had also received a major blow: one of their main political organizing groups, the *National Organization for an American Revolution* (NOAR), had disbanded in the mid-1980s, leaving James, Grace, and their circle pondering questions about the future of grassroots activism in the city. Seeing how large parts of the younger generation seemed to be disengaged from politics, and were flocking to the substance-selling business instead of confronting issues relating to the social and philosophical effects of capitalism, exacerbated these questions. What would become of Detroit if even its civil society, which had carried the majority of social progress, deserted the struggle? Who would confront the political and economic elite with the futility and disingenuity of their continued efforts? Who would call attention to the funneling of public monies away from schools and other basic infrastructure and towards hollow "revitalization efforts" that consistently underdelivered on their promises of job creation? Who would organize and picket to call attention to the structurally racist undercurrent of the economic logic behind these decisions? For over four decades, the Boggses had analyzed and debated the larger philosophical implications of capitalism for the human condition with countless fellow travelers. While there had been much disagreement on how to inspire change, the consensus that a revolution had to come about certainly persisted. But now James and Grace Lee Boggs were getting older, and it became increasingly clear that they were facing a recruitment issue.

Stumbling across a group of black elderly gardeners — the *Gardening Angels* — not only offered a life-line in these dire straits. Engaging successfully with young people and keeping them off the streets meant that they also kept them away from what the media had coined the "school-to-gang pipeline." Furthermore, these private approaches to urban agriculture offered a practical vision for the theoretical work they had been doing for decades. As the Boggses had cultivated grassroots approaches in their political activism, the *Gardening Angels*' informal network that flourished largely outside of the state-sponsored programs begat a form of community-organized self-help that the Boggses had envisioned in their philosophical debates. It was grassroots, an initiative by the people and for the people. And of those people, members like Gerald Hairston very much encompassed a practice-based critique of the entanglements of politics and capitalism in their work. Seeing how he and others used their personal relationships to connect people who needed help with those who could offer it, spoke to the nature and character of how Detroiters built resilience in the face of the urban crisis. They improvised, communicated, and networked their way toward solutions when political and economic elites wouldn't fulfill their implicit or even their tangible responsibilities. While the rest of the country was still buying into the American Dream of

economic prosperity and social mobility, many Detroiters had seen the other side of the coin for too long. As individuals and as communities, they were disillusioned. The economic and political system had shown such disregard for the city that Detroiters like the *Gardening Angels* looked to traditional republican notions of self-reliance, action stemming from individual citizens rather than government programs, and took it upon themselves to organize informally in order to see their visions materialize. And these visions had little to do with notions of individual success. They were driven by the collective struggle to survive. Not as individuals, but as communities. If the urban crisis had taught the *Gardening Angels* anything, then it was that individual survival meant very little if the environment around you was turning into a toxic and violent war zone. The Boggses identified with the conclusion that lay at the core of these gardening projects: engaging with local social, cultural, and un-built — or rather demolished — environments to build strength, resilience, and connectedness for future generations.

The Boggses not only found the *Gardening Angels* appealing because of *how* they did things, they also saw a vision in *what* they did, what it signified. As Gerald Hairston's normative critique showed, urban agriculture could mean much more than growing crops in a city suffering from food insecurity — widespread lack of access to fresh, unprocessed food. It was about finding and creating value outside the common notion of economic production and monetary abundance. The Boggses — true to their ideological roots — had long lamented the dehumanizing and alienating force of capitalism that reduced the value of human existence to the fiscal output of each person's productive capacity. To them, as to Hairston, human life should be about more than economic benefit, more than the sum at the end of a mathematical equation. They found value in personal and emotional connections that took place outside the production chain. By breaking human interaction down to monetized calculations, people lost their connections to others as well as themselves and their own needs.

On a philosophical level, Detroit's urban crisis signified the inevitable effects that a society centered around capitalist production logic entailed. After Marx, they saw that capitalism's historical tendency to accumulate profits within the hands of a small and wealthy elite would eventually mean that, after a place and its people had been squeezed dry of their profitable capabilities, those controlling the means of production would move on without a care in the world about what they left behind — and whom: alienated people who had lost their ability to build personal connections or find value in things that could not be measured in money. Through witnessing the deindustrialization of Detroit as union and civil rights activists — which supplied them with a specific lens — the Boggses had come to understand that this alienation happened on interpersonal levels as well as between people and place. Capitalism

entailed conceptions of temporality that broke down the connections between people and place, replacing personal connection to the land with property values. Environmental decay that became a visual signifier for Detroit over the course of its decline, was more than a metaphor of the urban crisis. It was the essence of inhabitability. The *Garden Angels*' engagement with and care for these spaces was a powerful place-making practice that counteracted the commodification of space and people.

A Growing Movement

It began with an argument at school. A mundane event. On this summer day in July 1986, it ended with one student pulling a gun on the other. The next day, 16-year-old Roger Barfield and his 15-year-old brother Derrick were on their way to confront the gunman, when he spotted them first. Jessie Harrison fired four shots into their car, critically wounding Roger. Derrick died at the scene. The 18-year-old assailant later stated in court that he was scared the two were armed themselves and coming for him, so he shot first. Sentenced to 16 to 24 months in prison, the shooter was released after serving ten.

Narco-crime had normalized such gun violence in schools and among Detroit youth to the point where the mundane blended into the horrifying on a daily basis. In 1986, 365 children 17 and under were hit by gunfire; 43 of them died. According to FBI statistics, guns accounted for 66.6 percent of children 16 and under killed that year in Detroit. The juvenile homicide rate jumped to 4.1 per 100,000, more than doubling the rate of the second deadliest city, Los Angeles (1.8 per 100,000). The issue was not a temporary one: between 1979 and 1986, Detroit topped the statistical average in comparison to other major U.S. cities, with 2.7 per 100,000 youth killed (second on the list was Chicago with 1.9). The total homicide rate, including all age groups, for the same time period revealed that youth homicide was only the tip of the iceberg. Where Detroit exhibited a rate of 47 per 100,000, the runner-up city in this statistic, Dallas, Texas, had a rate of 31.7. For average Detroiters, these statistics signified living in ceaseless fear of stray bullets in the privacy of their homes and random acts of violence in public spaces. Urban agricultural practice would soon become a tool for relatives of gun violence victims to confront public insecurity.

Clementine Barfield, the mother of Derrick and Roger, processed her grief by founding *Save Our Sons and Daughters* (SOSAD), an anti-gun-violence advocacy group. Through commemorative tree planting ceremonies and memory garden cultivation across the city,

SOSAD and Barfield quickly became leading progressive voices in Detroit. For these events, SOSAD would team up with other citizen groups like *We the People Reclaim Our Streets* (WE-PROS) and the *Detroit Green Party*,[40] which underlines the importance of environmental issues and activism in combatting social ills.[41] Planting trees where young Detroiters had been killed by gun violence transformed spaces of violence into places of commemoration and healing. It was only a matter of time before Barfield's and the Boggses' paths would cross. When they did, it was through *Detroiters for Dignity*, a group that James and Grace Lee Boggs had worked closely with for some years. *Detroiters for Dignity* addressed such varied topics as growing breadlines and inadequate food aid, Mayor Young's inability to intervene in the crack epidemic, and his plans to create jobs through the construction of casinos. The group introduced the notion of dignity in the face of the urban crisis, as opposed to state-driven efforts to police and control urban space. Among other things, this entailed picketing crack houses across the city. In these efforts, picketers went into the neighborhoods and laid claim to them by being present and outspoken about their needs as citizens who lived in and enlivened this city. They demonstrated that, contrary to popular depictions in the media, Detroit was neither empty of people nor of their needs, desires, or agency. In these intimate experiences, people got together to declare their opposition to narco-crime and boldly occupy, and eventually appropriate, spaces that had been deemed worthless. Opposition to substance abuse, and the horrific violence and human suffering it entailed, formed the basis of an informal network.

Harvest '88

In the summer of 1988, the budding network undertook a city-wide outreach effort. *Harvest '88*, an eight-week-long urban agriculture program for youth aged eleven to seventeen that would pay them wages of $40 per week, and provide training in horticulture, counseling, and academic tutoring, became a community organizing miracle. Program director Marsha Jones-Wright announced "[t]his isn't only a gardening project [...] We're going to be counseling the kids on alternatives to guns and fighting."[42] The Westminster Church of Detroit Presbyterian provided funding, land, and tools, as well as volunteer trainers with horticulture experience. With these combined efforts, participants cultivated a 194-by-154-foot garden. "At

[40] Boggs' involvement in founding of GP, Conference, Ditfurth
[41] Cf. Grace Lee Boggs, "Detroit Summer," in *EPA Journal* 18:1 (March 1992), 52.
[42] Janette Rodrigues, "City youngsters find their Eden in a tiny garden," *Detroit News* (7 July, 1988), 3B.

first I was more interested in the salary than doing plain work," one 15-year-old reported. "Now even if I didn't get paid, I'd still do this. I've found out that this work is hard, but it's better than doing wrong in the streets."[43] While children were learning to cultivate crops in community spaces, repurposing materials they found, and installing murals or sculptures, the organizers of Harvest '88 — activists around Grace Lee Boggs, namely Shea Howell, and SOSAD members — started weekly anti-crack marches. Picketing crack houses, chanting "Up with hope, down with dope," in their best efforts to disturb the eerie stillness of decay, the protesters successfully drove out many crack dependents and vendors.

Over the following years, the circle of progressive activism continued to grow and expand its practices. In 1990, SOSAD and the Boggses organized Detroit's first *Earth Day* and publicly connected ideas about urban environments to social issues:[44]

> Earth Day 1990 is a time to commit ourselves to creating new relationships based on respect for our planet and for each other […]) Over the last decade we have lost over 6,000 lives to violence in our city. We encourage the planting of trees […] to affirm our hope for the future of our children t o [sic!] inherit a city in which they can grow in security and peace.

The mass planting of commemorative trees for victims of gun violence on Detroit's Belle Isle island transformed vast areas of this prestigious place, home to historic swimming and boat clubs, as well as botanical gardens and a lightning tower entirely made of marble. In this particular setting, public memory activism breached class lines and established a budding woodland that signified as well as urged "security and peace" for future generations. The new spirit seemed to spread across the city, as grassroots groups and individuals started "rehabbing" abandoned houses and beautifying front yards. Grace Lee Boggs, displaying the social reformist notion of her organizing, later commented: "In the process, they have been helping to beautify neighborhoods, *revive the work ethic*, restore the city's tax base, and give hope to our young people."[45] With social reformism integrated in a community-centered economy, urban agriculture promised community revitalization from the ground up. As in later undertakings, the activists engaged local businesses in the community building efforts but kept away from engaging with government agencies. This stands in line with the Boggses' rather unfavorable consideration of government structures.

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[43] Ibid.
[44] "Misc env. activism, Detroit Summer and People's Festival, 1990-92," in James & Grace Lee Boggs Collection, Box 7, Folder 23, WPRA.
[45] My italics, G. L. Boggs (1992), 53.

Detroit People's Festival and *Detroit Summer*

The following year, the coalition continued their organizing efforts by holding a *People's Festival.* The aim was to bring together "successful neighborhood organizations, block clubs and community leaders for joint planning and discussion [of a] rich variety of self-help activities including renovating and repairing houses, planting trees and community gardens, children's activities and art and economic cooperatives."[46] As the vision for community resilience became clearer, urban agriculture began to signify a solution for economic challenges, in addition to its sociocultural and political potential. Self-reliance, spatial intervention, and social responsibility were core motives. The printed program read:[47]

> There is a new spirit rising in Detroit. It is found where people are rehabbing abandoned houses, walking streets against crack and crime, planting gardens, reclaiming our neighborhoods as places of safety and peace for ourselves and our children.
> It is a spirit born out of the depths of a city crisis. For too long our neighborhoods have been allowed to deteriorate. For too long our scarce tax dollars have gone to subsidize megaprojects [sic] with little return for the people. For too long have our streets been places of violence and danger.
> It is the spirit born out of people struggling together. The spirit that builds Community, Compassion, Cooperations, Participation and Enterprise as we strive for harmony with one another and with our Earth. The spirit that says WE THE PEOPLE will education [sic] our children. WE will create productive and loving communities. WE will rebuild our city.

Rehabbing efforts in decaying neighborhoods, often paired with community-based agriculture, became one of the core strategies of these bottom-up interventions in Detroit's urban crisis. Forming new connections between residents and aiming to attract newcomers, Detroiters took it upon themselves to bring their city back from the brink.

Simultaneously, it seemed that every step forward was accompanied by tragic and outrageous disruption. As the progressive urban agricultural circle started to look for more permanent formats like a summer school, the Rodney King beating shook the nation. Once again, structural racism and police violence threatened to upset the delicate healing process taking place in urban America. For Grace Lee Boggs the events served as further inspiration for relentless activism. *Detroit Summer*, which began as a community project and summer school in 1992 and has since evolved into a K12 school and community center, would "make clear to the nation and the world that the No. 1 priority of our time is the reconstruction of our

[46] Statement of purpose "Our Philosophy – People's Festival Committee," in James & Grace Lee Boggs Collection, Box 7, Folder 23, WPRA.
[47] Quoted in Ward, 330.

cities from the bottom up."[48] In the original four-week summer program, youth from Detroit and across the nation worked alongside Green Party members in small groups, in different neighborhoods, rehabbing houses, cleaning alleys, and planting trees and community gardens.[49] Children and youth also collected soil samples that were then tested for toxins to determine appropriate and safe spaces for crop cultivation. Several greenhouses made out of repurposed materials that participants had collected, helped extend the growing season for urban crop cultivators of all ages.[50] Members of the *Gardening Angels* assisted participants like 15-year-old Tracy Hollins, who recalls her experience in *Detroit Summer*: "It filled your head with answers to questions that you'd had all your life and questions that no one can answer. It made you feel that you were an important part of the changing and molding of future generations. It made you feel that the hole you dug, the garden you watered or the swing set you painted, made a difference."[51] Grace Lee Boggs pointed to the *Mississippi Freedom Summer* of 1964 as inspiration, declaring that "'recivilizing' [sic] our cities […] will encourage young people at the local and national level to take responsibilities for our communities, our cities, and our country. It will create a fellowship between generations and make clear that the devastation of American cities is not 'their' problem but 'ours.' It will let the world know that together we can overcome."[52] By connecting efforts to register blacks to vote in Mississippi, "re-civilizing," and *Detroit Summer*'s intervention in neighborhoods, Grace Lee Boggs points to the interconnections between established signifiers of "citizenship" (voting rights) and forming, caring for, and physically occupying space as a particularly urban, alternative, and inclusive conception of "citizenship." She also mirrors James Boggs's reformist notions of using urban agriculture to re-educate participants.

Just as these re-imaginings of post-industrial, urban life began to flourish, Detroit lost James Boggs to cancer in 1993. Grace continued their work for another twenty years.[53]

[48] "Detroit Summer '92" Flyer, in James & Grace Lee Boggs Collection, Box 9, Folder 15, WPRA.
[49] Cf. Emilia Askari, "Greens to deploy force in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, 27 Feb 1992, 3; Ward, 330f.
[50] Cf. Own interview with Shea Howell, Detroit, March 19, 2018.
[51] Quoted in Ward, 331.
[52] G. L. Boggs (1992), 53.
[53] On October 5, 2015, Grace Lee Boggs died at the age of 100 in Detroit.

Environmental Citizenship

By 1994, Detroit had become home to a lively and visible environmental justice movement. From it, there emerged a diverse alliance of actors who organized the first *National Environmental Justice Conference*. Groups targeting varied issues such as the creation of a medical waste incinerator, Native American land rights and sovereignty, environmentally friendly occupations, and intercultural community organizing, as well as *Detroit Summer* Youth Volunteers, gave presentations. Calls for community gardens and domestic food production programs featured in the conference's recommendations. As the last governmental urban agricultural programs lost their public funding, participants urged their expansion and called for increased nutrition education resources.[54] Furthermore, some participants suggested increased school gardening and integrated health and nutrition education curricula for local schools. As I explore below, the *Catherine Ferguson Academy* would take up this suggestion and integrate agriculture training into its curriculum.

Environmental hazards and the effects of pollution on locals were further key themes of the conference. As a study by the University of Michigan charged, "toxic waste causing fatal diseases such as cancer, are dumped into areas composed of Black people."[55] Often, the legal system offered no assistance or let polluters off with lenient punishment; preventative measures were inexistent. In order to address such systemic, institutional issues, conference participants worked out a list of suggestions to ensure legal protection from environmental hazards:[56]

- Have legal issues focus on prevention of harm, not just providing remedies after the harm is established.

[…]

- Have a "three strikes and you're out" rule to corporate polluters […]
- Require the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, which local environmentalists say, are soft on polluters, to submit environmental impact statements on facilities they give permits to.
- Ensure that community input through public hearing and other means occurs before permits are granted on the city and state level.

[…]

- Increase City of Detroit fines for dumping from the "inadequate" level of $300 and make the owner of the hazardous waste pay, as well as the person caught dumping.
- Put fine money in a clean up fund, instead of the general fund.

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[54] End of both programs

[55] Ron Seigel, "Conference drafts recommendations to battle environmental racism," *Michigan Citizen* 16:34 (23 July, 1994), A1.

[56] Ron Seigel, "Conference drafts recommendations to battle environmental racism," *Michigan Citizen* 16:34 (23 July, 1994), A1.

[…]

- Have laws review the combined effect of hazardous waste dumps and incinerators, instead of looking at each facility as an isolated case.
- Have city residents follow up with various departments to determine if environmentally correct procedures are being followed according to ordinance and state laws.

The list addresses environmental degradation and pollution by centering the experiences of affected residents. While decrying the inadequacies of punitive measures, the suggestions foreground preventative approaches that offer protection and aim to consider the interconnections between the environment, human health, and safety. Rob Nixon has theorized the practice of corporate polluters who externalize costs by dumping hazardous waste as *slow violence*, a form of violence whose effects on people and environments work slowly, are hard to measure, and unfold often close to invisibly — as opposed to the rapid visual spectacle of other forms of physical violence.[57] The demands of the *National Environmental Justice Conference* take off from decrying *slow violence* and fostering not only an awareness of these issues among residents and political leaders but also proposing measures that empower residents themselves to hold perpetrators accountable. In this approach, residents' environmental agency expands. Environmental safety and political action become intertwined, expanding the conception of the public domain as well as the rights and responsibilities of citizens toward the environment. By calling for broader legal protection and rights, the larger political and economic structures undergirding environmental pollution become as important as the individual rights to combat them. This counteracts the neoliberal ideal that, as Mary Beth Pudup concisely put it, "citizenship achieves its most perfect expression through consumer choice in the marketplace."[58] Instead of marketplace choices, which often depend on forms of mobility that exclude the socioeconomically underprivileged, the expansion of citizens' environmental rights aims to broaden participation in the public domain.

The notion of environmental citizenship became of growing interest to political theorists in the 1990s. Sherilyn McGregor has outlined a broad and insightful critique of the theoretical concept, which can help us understand the specificities of this case study. McGregor cautions that "citizenship as 'green duty' dovetails (unintentionally) into a dominant neoliberal agenda that employs 'duties discourse' to facilitate the reduction of state provision of social services. Since the 1980s, the equation of citizenship with responsibility has become an escape route for

[57] Cf. Nixon, *Slow Violence*…, 6f.
[58] May Beth Pudup, "It takes a garden: Cultivating citizen-subjects in organized garden projects," Geoforum, 39:3 (2008), 1238.

governments as they move to dismantle the welfare state."[59] In this development, citizenship has "become instrumentalised as a solution to a problem: it is regarded as a way to both enlist public participation in the management of national affairs and to relieve the duty of government to provide goods and services to the population."[60] Furthermore, McGregor presents a feminist critique and highlights how traditional, exclusionary notions of citizenship shape the conception of environmental citizenship. Historically marginalized voices disappear under a cloak of structural androcentric and white class privilege, while environmental citizenship becomes a neoliberal greenwashing of deeply imbedded *slow violence*. The *National Environmental Justice Conference* demands circumvent some of these problematic issues by urging government responsibility toward its citizens. Calling for preemptive regulation and an expansion of punitive measures for corporate polluters expands government intervention in service of the health and well-being of structurally disproportionately affected citizens. However, one could simultaneously argue that the demands also entail a neoliberal responsibilization of citizens by expanding individual rights to police and report environmental hazards and pollution. As a historian (and not a political theorist) I argue that the demands reflect two place-specific developments that have accompanied Detroit's post-World-War-II transformation: 1. Government withdrawal was by no means a new experience for Detroiters, as the authorities stood idly by throughout white-flight suburbanization. Government inaction deemed the economic bloodletting of cities as inevitable, resulting in mounting government skepticism of citizens, which was further amplified by violent policing. 2. Detroit's history as a *movement city* means that the dual notions of expansion of equal rights and expansion of the participation of the marginalized in the public domain are core values, ingrained in the local culture. The local political culture, thus, builds on the notions of rights and public participation, as well as the demand for accountability, which the demands of the *National Environmental Justice Conference* reflect.

Grace Lee Boggs, and the numerous activists who had become part of her circle, expanded the local network of social and environmental justice activism. This helped carry the idea of urban agriculture as a bottom-up, socioenvironmental intervention and reform effort into the new millennium. In 1998, Detroit had some 70,000 empty lots.[61] Within five decades, the population had dwindled from around two million to less than 950,000 in 2000. Since 1970,

[59] Sherilyn McGregor, "No Sustainability without Justice: A Feminist Critique of Environmental Citizenship," paper presented at PSA conference (Bath, 2007), 4.
[60] Ibid., 5.
[61] Grace Lee Boggs, "Seize the time," *Michigan Citizen* 31:29 (31 May, 2009), A10.

the number of whites living in Detroit had fallen by 50 percent every ten years. In the 1990s, the number of Blacks (and Asians) also started to decrease, as Latinx migration became the only demographic category that offered some population growth. For the municipality, 139 square miles of land — vast parcels of which brought no revenue and produced maintenance costs — presented an insurmountable problem. For activists it began to signify the potential to (re-)build a city on their own terms: With the political leadership continuing to bet on heavily tax-subsidized projects to create jobs and slashing municipal services whenever and wherever possible, the overall relative absence of government opened up spaces that could be filled with little or no interference. What signified the neoliberalization of governance to some meant the freedom to imagine and build a city on alternative ideas. From today's perspective, I contend that the long-term challenge of this social and philosophical transformation would be the inevitable tension between social, philosophical, and environmental change on the one hand, and continuity (or lack of change) in the political system, on the other: Detroit's story is by no means a continuous story of decline. Whenever the cyclical nature of capitalism provided some fiscal relief or (federal- or state-driven) economic revitalization programs offered opportunities to spend large amounts of tax monies on the latest trends in top-down urban revitalization, the municipal government would re-emerge and re-claim its authority over the city.

Detroit Agriculture Network

As the 1990s were coming to a close, Detroit's environment was greener than it had ever been. Population numbers kept declining and the city looked increasingly like an urban prairie. For urban agriculturalists, this signified a kind of coming full circle; a return to the romanticized frontier. With this return came significant everyday challenges, like decreasing police-response time, crumbling schools, and the lack of access to and affordability of fresh food. As such problems increased, so did an awareness that self-organized urban crop production could not only help alleviate food security, but that the human networks necessary to sustain and spread the practice also counteracted social isolation. *Detroit Summer* had inspired a growing network of socioenvironmental activism; however, many of its projects centered around educating children. The politicized milieu from which it grew focused on passing political, ideological knowledge and thinking on to the future generation. This was certainly an important undertaking, especially considering the mounting political disillusionment amongst Detroiters, who were, thus, (perhaps unknowingly) risking the lived memory of Detroit as a movement

city. At the same time, while the focus on intergenerational child and youth education re-wove bonds between the young and the elderly, a vacuum opened up for those Detroiters who fell in between these age groups.

The *Detroit Agriculture Network* (DAN) formed to fill this gap. As a bottom-up initiative that interacted with a host of non-profit organizations and educational institutions, the source material is difficult to disentangle. Due to the fact that sources originate from various actors — political groups, media reports, non-academic books, and an anthropological study — they sometimes contradict each other, and often leave out key information for historical research.[62] Fortunately, I was able to obtain a copy of Karl M. Steyaert's ethnographic study "From Motor City to Garden City: Sustainability and Urban Agriculture in Detroit,"[63] that gives portraits of a number of DAN members. While Steyaert's focus on socioeconomic and environmental sustainability in community building leaves out key information on institutional connections, the background of his study is insightful. He conducted the study between September 8, 1998 and January 1, 2001 as a graduate researcher of the University of Michigan, funded by a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).[64] This signals that Detroit's vibrant urban gardening and farming activities had, by this point, become known outside of the city and had begun to attract researchers as well as institutions who were willing to fund such studies. Some six years after the last government program had ended, bottom-up urban agriculture was becoming part of the larger, ongoing discourse on the possibility of Detroit's socioeconomic recovery. In short, academic and non-profit institutions were starting to take the practice seriously.

DAN fundamentally contributed to this changing atmosphere, alleviating urban agricultural practice within the city and attracting attention from beyond Detroit. It is difficult to ascertain when exactly DAN was founded: oral interviewees remained vague, guesstimating the mid- to late-1990s; Steyaert does not mention a year of inception, and neither do Boggs and Kurashige,[65] nor John Gallagher;[66] and the first newspaper mention appears in May 2000,[67]

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[62] Contradictions and lacking information are highlighted in the following text and footnotes.
[63] Karl M. Steyaert, *From Motor City to Garden City. Sustainability and Urban Agriculture in Detroit,* (Master's thesis, unpublished, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2001).
[64] Cf. United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Project Research Results," Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Graduate Fellowship (2001), online: https://cfpub.epa.gov/ncer_abstracts/index.cfm/fuseaction/display.abstractDetail/abstract/2204 (accessed: March 10, 2020).
[65] Cf. Grace Lee Boggs and Scott Kurashige. *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 119f.
[66] Cf. John Gallagher. *Reimagining Detroit: Opportunities for Redefining an American City* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 153.
[67] Cf. Detroit Free Press, "How to Volunteer," May 25, 2000, 34.

when DAN was already well-established. Boggs and Kurashige suggest that DAN resulted from an initiative by the Greater Detroit Health Council, a private, multi-stakeholder healthcare collaborative.[68] The *Detroit Free Press* refers to it as a "project of the Detroit Hunger Action Coalition,"[69] a grassroots initiative combating the city's hunger crisis. Keeping in mind the improvisational networking that led to the inception of *Detroit Summer*, and the parallel absences of government entities in both initiatives, it is safe to assume that DAN started in similar ways. In fact, many DAN members seem to have been active in several of the groups that used urban agriculture in one way or another to engage with different facets of Detroit's urban crisis. Gerald Hairston, the highly active *Gardening Angel*, as well as Marsha Jones, a SOSAD member since 1988, were early leaders of DAN.[70] All in all, I would characterize DAN as an attempt to formalize the growing grassroots urban agriculture activities in order to strengthen individual practices by interconnecting them. The fact that DAN still exists today, though the name has changed to *Keep Growing Detroit* — the largest urban agriculture non-profit organization in the city — speaks to the long-term success of this formalization.[71]

DAN signified both continuity and change in Detroit's urban agriculture milieu. For members like Lillie Mae Neal, a Black woman who first moved to the city from rural Mississippi in the late 1950s, DAN was simply the next destination in a life filled with cultivating crops. "Ever since she came to Detroit, Lillie Mae has had her own garden behind her house,"[72] reported Steyaert. Her garden expanded beyond the limits of her property to empty lots that had once contained her neighbors' houses. When the land became city-owned property, Neal gained access to it through the municipal *Farm-A-Lot* program. By the time Steyaert interviewed her for his research, she was 73 years old and living off a small fixed income provided by disability benefits. She received $44 per month in food stamps, "hardly enough to feed her, so the produce from the garden [was] a critical source for Lillie Mae."[73] Gardening not only provided her with food to sustain her, it also filled her with a sense of pride, joy, and fulfillment: "I work by myself. I work every day… I like to work. What so ever you want, you work for it. I just love gardening. I love to see stuff grow."[74] Excess harvests, canned and frozen, sustained her throughout cold Michigan winters, and often, she had enough to spare

[68] Cf. Boggs and Kurashige, *Next Revolution*, 119.
[69] Detroit Free Press, "How to Volunteer."
[70] Cf. Steyaert, 20-22.
[71] Elaborate on how it was first taken over by the Greening of Detroit, then split,
[72] Steyaert, 20.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

with family and fellow senior citizens in her community.[75] Her story exemplifies the historic roots of urban agriculture in Detroit that I have chronicled thus far.

Other members of DAN signify new impulses that grew out of this network. One example is Tera Holcomb. A white woman — in her early twenties when Steyaert interviewed her — born and raised on a farm in rural Michigan and now an active urban agriculturalist in Detroit, her demographic poses an early signifier of white (re-)migration to the majority-black city.[76] Holcomb's journey to Detroit was by way of San Francisco, where a community garden project inspired her and her partner. Familiar with the necessary knowledge of plant cultivation, she banded together with friends and moved to Detroit to start a community garden, which gave them the chance to offer agricultural training to those interested. Soon after, they launched a non-profit organization and a cooperative business.[77] "[Tera and her friends] want to help revive neighborhoods of the inner city, but instead of displacing the present low income resident [sic] with large scale development as many renewal projects in Detroit do, they seek to retain the present residents and sustain socioeconomic diversity in the community,"[78] explains Steyaert. As I explore further in chapter VI, the politics of white (re-)migration, often inspired by the notion of "helping" and driven by privileges that many Detroiters lack, can cause tensions between urban agriculturalists. At this point, I want to point out that this tension does not simply arise from white skin color. Paul Weertz, an early leader of DAN and a well-respected presence in Detroit's urban farming circles today, is a white man. What sets him apart from practitioners like Holcomb is that Weertz has lived in the city his entire life. He worked in local schools as a teacher for several decades while cultivating a passion for urban agriculture in his own backyard. Through his biography, Weertz is deeply connected to the city. As a teacher, he could have moved to the suburbs where schools are well-funded. Yet, Weertz is one of "the ones who chose to stay," a label that carries tremendous social capital in Detroit.

Furthermore, Paul Weertz demonstrated how expanding networks like DAN could produce innovative change that went beyond Detroit's urban agriculture community. A biology teacher and self-taught crop cultivator, Weertz turned his urban farm into an agricultural educational center that is home to a variety of livestock. A beehive, chickens, turkeys, ducks, quail, rabbits, and even a horse are part of the farm, as are various agricultural tools and machinery that Weertz shares freely with fellow urban agriculturalists across the city. In the

[75] Cf. Ibid.
[76] Cf. chapter VI.
[77] Cf. Steyaert, 19f.
[78] Ibid., 20.

late 1990s, when he joined the staff of the *Catherine Ferguson Academy* (CFA), a public high school for pregnant girls and teen mothers, his devotion to urban farming took on a new meaning. Weertz started out teaching biology by bringing in young quails for students to look after and raise. Encouraged by the effects he was seeing in the young mothers and mothers-to-be, he expanded his undertaking and only a few years later, the CFA had achieved local fame for its thriving urban farm. CFA students connected with *Detroit Summer* students in joint projects. Soil testing, soil remediation, and even house rehabbing became part of the two institutions' curricula.[79] "A lot of what's taught out there is not just science," commented Weertz in 2007. "It's nurturing, taking care of animals, growing plants, looking at change over time. A lot of the things that can happen with gardening are good lessons for parenting too."[80] By 2011, the CFA's farm had grown to some 200 garden plots whose maintenance was mandatory for each class. With graduation numbers exceeding 99 percent, 90 percent of students attending a two- or a four-year college, and these numbers coming out of a school district where students were hardly expected to graduate at all, the CFA became famous beyond Detroit's boundaries.[81] However, in spite of this unprecedented success, the school was put on the cynically titled *Renaissance 2012 Plan*, designating it for closure. While it was allowed to continue operating as a for-profit charter school until 2014, the CFA ultimately succumbed to the austerity politics that have effectively governed Detroit since the 2008 financial crisis.

[79] Cf. Grace Lee Boggs, "LIVING FOR CHANGE; Young mothers celebrate Mother Earth," *Michigan Citizen* (May 17, 2003), B8.
[80] Weertz quoted in Eric T. Campbell, "City students learn to farm," *Michigan Citizen* (July 1, 2007), A1.
[81] Cf. Sybila Valdivieso, "The Catherine Ferguson Academy - Spirit of Detroit," *Michigan Chronicle* 88/89 (Fall, 2011), 1.

VI. Outlook: An Urban Agrarian Myth? (2008-today)

Detroit: Saviors?

The tale of the *Catherine Ferguson Academy* was the first story connected to urban agriculture in Detroit that I ever heard. Upon my arrival in the city, I asked local urban farmers about it. Greg Willerer, a local institution and one of the leaders of for-profit farming, replied "Oh, well, that's dead."[1] He was right.

The second story, which I encountered during the early days of this project, was that of *Hantz Farms*. It goes something like this:

John Hantz, a successful businessman, who made millions on Wall Street, moved to Detroit some twenty years ago. Every day, he would drive from his mansion in the Indian Village, Detroit, to his office in Southfield, Michigan. At some point, something changed. In his words:[2]

> I would take back roads and I'd look out the window and I'd tell myself, Something has to happen. Something has to change. One day I was sitting at a traffic light, thinking this through from an economics point of view, and I thought, What's our problem? Why doesn't it get better?

As an economist, Hantz understood that the abundance of land depressed its value. As an economist, his solution was to create artificial scarcity. So he asked himself: "What's a development that people would want to be associated with? And that's when I came up with a farm."[3] Not any farm, mind you. This is America, so it had to be the world's largest urban farm! The city believed in his competence (one cannot repeat this often enough: he was a very successful businessman, who had made millions on Wall Street!) and granted him the unprecedented right to buy an unprecedented amount of land for unprecedentedly little money in an unprecedentedly short time period. It was a magical story, really. Things just seemed to fall right into place.

Of course, there were some who complained. But aren't there always? The complaints became louder when Hantz announced that based on his expertise and that of other experts, they had crunched the numbers and looked more closely at their plan, which led them to the reasonable conclusion that an urban farm was too much of a hassle (from the perspective of a very successful economist! And did I mention that he made millions on Wall Street?). But

[1] Field notes, Detroit, September 12, 2014.
[2] Quoted in Eleanor Smith, "John Hantz," *The Atlantic* (Nov. 2010), online: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/11/john-hantz/308277/ (accessed Mar. 14, 2020).
[3] Ibid.

aren't complaints always loud? And between the world's greatest urban farm and the world's greatest urban tree farm lies only one word. It's a good one, too: Tree! Same difference and the attacks were nasty, anyways. Vulgar and full of envy. Some claimed they had been trying to purchase land from the city for years. They claimed that Hantz got preferential treatment, while they were held up in the trenches. A land grab, they charged. He would only place trees as placeholders for the contractually obligated three-year period, then develop the land "for his own benefit." Hantz felt $520,000 for 140 acres was a fair price.[4] Consider the investments he would make in the future! The ideological blind spots of his critics evidently concealed the obvious: A very successful businessman (who had made millions on Wall Street) was humbly offering his riches to save this broken city.

Did the city not want to be saved?

There are several reasons why I tell this story with so much sarcasm. After careful consideration of the facts, years of engaging with local urban agriculturalists and the historical, local, and interregional traditions they continue, and insightful personal interactions with *Hantz Woodlands* and/or *Hantz Farms* (their homepage still lists both), I have come to the conclusion that this story needs sarcasm. Told genuinely, without this humorous distance, it would solely be cynical. If there is one thing Detroit doesn't need more of, it's cynicism.

Let's take a look at what Hantz leaves out of his narrative. For one, he leaves out the rich local history of urban agriculture that I chronicled in the preceding chapters. While most of this history had been unwritten thus far, Hantz must have, at the very least, been aware of the more recent urban agricultural activity in Detroit. Sentences like "[a]nd that's when I came up with a farm"[5] imply he was a pioneer of this practice, which erases the preceding and contemporary practices of countless Detroiters. Due to his status, Hantz has had access to well-respected national media (like *The Atlantic* and the *New York Times* that I cite here), which has popularized his story far beyond Detroit. This speaks to the vast divergence in power and influence between him and other local agriculturalists — a divergence that is woven throughout his entire story.

On the Hantz Woodlands/Farms homepage, I found an astonishing piece of narrative. Under the section "Our Story," the homepage features the trailer of a 2016 documentary film

[4] Cf. Leslie Macmillan, "Detroit Narrowly Approves Vast Land Sale," New York Times (Dec. 11, 2012), online: https://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/11/detroit-narrowly-approves-vast-land-sale/ (accessed Mar. 14, 2020).
[5] Quoted in Smith, "John Hantz."

entitled "Land Grab."[6] The trailer presents a host of well-known urban agriculture practitioners criticizing John Hantz and his project. It ends on the inspiring note, underlined by moving string music, that Hantz overcame his critics and created a successful urban (tree) farm that improved its surrounding areas. The film premiered at the 2016 Detroit Film Festival. The *Detroit Free Press* headline read "Film on Hantz Farms doesn't flinch from controversy."[7] From the article, I learned that the film's director, Sean O'Grady, regarded himself an outsider, who "couldn't really understand why people were opposed to the project."[8] The film's narrative contrasts Hantz with Detroit's history of urban developers breaking their promises and leaving communities behind in shambles. Accordingly, "the fact that Hantz lives there provided a level of accountability on him to follow through with his promises, which the film demonstrates Hantz did."[9] On a side note, the article also mentions that John Hantz helped pay for the completion of the film. Before the reader ponders this bit of information for too long, the article closes on the message of the film, provided by its the director: "For me, it really came down to that people shouldn't let their ideologies or their politics get in the way of progress."[10] While Hantz has seen his share of local controversy, he and his team of well-paid, highly-educated staffers have turned public relations and message control into an art form. Following the progressive grassroots strategy of "reclamation," they have managed to do just that. Hantz has reclaimed the term *land grab*, originally intended to critique him and the divergence of power at play, and turned it into a glossy story about benevolent philanthropy.

Why don't I buy it? Let me tell you about my most insightful interaction with Hantz Woodlands and/or Farms. On March 23, 2018, I went to interview Mike Score, President of Hantz Farms. We spoke for about an hour, in which he told me his personal story. He elaborated on his studies of economics, how he had used his knowledge to train aspiring urban farming entrepreneurs in Detroit. He lamented their failings, and spoke at length about his deep Christian faith that called on him to do good in the world. His words were genuine and open, even though they had clearly been repeated many times before. When I asked him about tensions with other agriculture projects, his face darkened, and he warned me, that "those people are communists."[11] The ill-informed popularity of this term in American neoliberal and

[6] Sean O'Grady, director, Land Grab, trailer, online: http://www.hantzfarmsdetroit.com/ourstory.html (accessed March 12, 2020).
[7] Matt Helms, "Film on Hantz Farms doesn't flinch from controversy," Detroit Free Press (Apr. 1, 2016), online: https://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/2016/04/01/film-hantz-farms-doesnt-flinch-controversy/82527656/ (accessed Mar. 14, 2020).
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Interview with Mike Score, Detroit, Mar. 23, 2018.

conservative circles had long amused me. But where I was close to giggling, Score was genuinely and deeply concerned. His perspective begged respect. When I asked about community involvement, Score's face lit up and he proudly reported that most trees had been planted by neighbors. The feedback from the community to Hantz Farms had been overwhelmingly positive, he claimed. He was visibly proud to be involved in a project that seemingly changed a Detroit neighborhood for the better.[12] Before I left, Score invited me to take a look myself, pointing out streets where the work had already been completed. Curious, I got into my rental. I arrived at the first street on my list, exited the car, and went to look at group of recently planted, juvenile trees. They were timber wood trees. Timber wood trees typically need at least two decades of growth before they can be harvested. In order to grow to an appropriate size, timber wood trees need to be planted at an appropriate distance from one another — the minimum is usually about ten feet. These timber wood trees were planted less than four feet apart. I drove around for another half hour, stopping on numerous blocks to look at young trees. None of them were planted in a way that would facilitate what Hantz Woodlands and/or Farms had been advertising: urban tree farming. As I was driving around, taking pictures, muttering to myself, I became keenly aware of where I was. I was on John Hantz's property. And there was a ringing in my ears. It was the memory of Greg Willerer telling me "Hantz is full of it. You know he's already constructing condos, right?"[13]

Detroit: Roots!

On a late-summer Sunday morning in 2014, I borrowed my host's car to volunteer at *D-Town Farm*. Since it is located in Rouge Park at the very edge of Detroit's northeastern city line, I insisted on a personal principle: It is one thing to get up early on a Sunday (fine), and an entirely different thing to spend over an hour biking there (not fine). *D-Town Farm,* and the *Detroit Black Community Food Security Network* (DBCFSN) who runs it, had intrigued me ever since I first read about them in the months leading up to this research trip. Environmental sociologist and native Detroiter Monica M. White has provided in-depth analyses of the sociocultural and environmental justice dimensions of DBCFSN.[14] Some 80 percent of black Detroiters rely on

[12] Cf. Ibid.
[13] Field notes, Detroit, November 1, 2015.
[14] For the most recent, in-depth analysis of the DBCFSN by Monica M. White, cf. chapter 5, "Drawing on the Past toward a Food Sovereign Future: *The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network*," in Monica M. White. Freedom Farmers. Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement (Chapel Hill: University of

so-called *fringe food retailers*. These include "liquor stores, gas stations, party stores, dollar stores, bakeries, pharmacies, convenience stores and other venues."[15] Due to this fact, Detroit has been termed a food desert. To those affected, this label means that they have no access to fresh, unprocessed food without traveling more than one mile — a distance that requires physical ability, access to vehicles, or appropriate, affordable, and reliable public transport, resources that many of the poorest citizens do not have. The DBCFSN's aim is to counteract this food insecurity. It targets the intersection of race and class that has historically produced racialized poverty, and has an apparent political agenda. "The political ideology of the organization, and subsequently of many of its members, is undeniably influenced by the tenets of Black Nationalism," explains White. "While not all respondents would identify themselves as Black Nationalists, many of the founding members of the organization and its philosophy demonstrate the influence of the radicalism of the 1960s. Many still consider themselves freedom fighters against capitalist and racist oppression."[16] In times when nationalist ideologies are on the rise globally, a denominator like *Black Nationalism* might be off-putting, as it bears the connotations of reactionary political ideologies built on notions of racial pride and purity. However, the history of Black Nationalism is multilayered and complicated. Furthermore, in my observation, local activists seem to be prone to use such terminology rather as a nod to the city's vibrant history of black activism, than an endorsement of its ideological significance. White also states:[17]

> DBCFSN, formed to address food insecurity in the black community, represents the majority African American population and is motivated by the belief that successful community change should be led by leaders from within its own community. Nevertheless, this organization strives to improve access to quality food to all citizens of Detroit as it organizes to improve the city's future. The activities of DBCFSN can be viewed as a first step in building partnerships with other community-based organizations, as well as public agencies, so residents can work to rebuild their city.

The notion of leadership from within communities paired with an openness to "outsiders" positions the DBCFSN in an Afrocentric, autonomous, and inclusive tradition.

North Carolina Press, 2018).

[15] Mari Gallagher, "Examining the impact of food deserts on public health in Detroit," report (Chicago: Mari Gallagher Research & Consulting Group, 2007), 5, online: https://www.marigallagher.com/2007/06/19/examining-the-impact-of-food-deserts-on-public-health-in-detroit-june-19-2007/ (accessed Mar. 12, 2020).

[16] Monica M. White, "Sisters of the Soil: Urban Gardening as Resistance in Detroit," Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts, Volume 5, Number 1, (Autumn 2011), 16.

[17] White, "Sisters…," 15.

For me, a white German who was about to volunteer at D-Town Farm, the dual outsider status seemed a bit daunting, as I did not know what to expect. However, I knew that this was an important (if not the most important) farm to visit. And I had questions, too. From media reports, I had learned that Rouge Park was the third location of D-Town Farm. Two earlier attempts to establish the farm had been short-lived. I suspected that the church communities, who had welcomed the DBCFSN to construct an urban farm on their properties, were just as happy to see the group go after one or two growing seasons. A DBCFSN member later quietly acknowledged my suspicion, but did not confirm it. To me, this spoke to the diversity of interests and perspectives in the local black community. My research showed me that acknowledging this multivocality and multipositionality is important. I am also convinced that my place is that of a respectful, observant visitor, and not that of an opinionated commentator.

If my drive up to D-Town had been done in uncaffeinated and, thus, rather foggy apprehension, arriving at the farm quickly put me at ease. We began our volunteer hours by forming a circle, greeting and welcoming each other, and expressing joyful anticipation. It was going to be yet another wonderfully sunny day, and Mama Aba, our volunteer leader, reminded us to drink enough water. Before I took to my tasks, I went on a little stroll across the farm. Large rows of collard greens, protected from rabbits by tight-knit wire fencing, told me stories about black culinary traditions, as well as the challenges of urban natural environments. Large composting piles indicated organic soil remediation. They made me wonder about the nutritional health of local communities, the health of their environments, and the interconnectedness of the two. A young, black man coolly operated his tractor past stacks of beehives, signaling the symbiosis of old and new, tradition and re-invention. When I returned to D-Town the following weekend for their annual harvest festival, my eco-romantic mind was in dire need of a reality check. I listened to a variety of lectures on nutrition and food security. They exemplified the political aspect of D-Town: food is about power. If marginalized communities aim to be resilient, they need to assume control over their food supply. The short, yet mercurial, history of D-Town Farm has shown that such autonomy depends on long-term, sustainable access to land.

Detroit: Borderlands.

Over the course of my research, I have given many presentations to academic as well as lay audiences. One of the key issues in preparing these presentations was finding visual depictions that help clarify "what Detroit is like now," as I have often been asked. Simultaneously, it has been my aim, and a challenge, to capture audiences in a dignified way, without exploiting the visual and narrative extremes that constitute everyday life and everyday struggle for Detroiters.

Post-industrial Detroit has become a popular subject for photographers. Former auto plants, mansions, and houses — often ravaged by fire, now overgrown with lichen and hardy fauna, covered in crumbling graffiti — seem to concisely summarize this new, post-Fordist *Gilded Age* we live in. Photographers like Andrew L. Moore (*Detroit Disassembled*, 2010) have popularized dramatic and aestheticized images of deserted Detroit. Their images erase locals, while they themselves profit financially, and leave the city and its people behind as quickly as possible. The common name of this practice is *ruin porn*. Within the normative framing of poverty in the United States, such exploitative depictions of abandonment carry tremendous stigma and shame. In my attempts to speak honestly and compassionately about this city, its residents, and its environment, I often used an aerial image by Alex S. MacLean that was published in the *New York Times*. The upper half of the image shows an urban grid of streets dividing up empty properties. The bottom half of the image shows the same urban grid but featuring houses and cars on every property. The street in the middle that separates the two halves is also the north-eastern city line of Detroit.

I have used this image to talk about Detroit in juxtaposition to its neighboring suburb Grosse Pointe Park. One side has an average of about half the country's median family income, the other side about double. One side is 83 percent black, ten percent white, the other side almost exactly the opposite. One side has water shutoffs for those who fall behind on their bills, the other side has a police response time of two to three minutes. One side recently topped the United States' per capita murder rate, the other side has not one but two historic horse clubs. For German audiences, the extent of the inequality and the fact that it exists in such proximity was often almost incomprehensible. A structural explanation can be easily found: municipalities are fundamentally dependent on their tax bases because meaningful financial redistribution mechanisms are inexistent. The cultural explanations are not so simple, as I have shown in the preceding chapters.

Over the past decade, Detroit has seen an economic renaissance. Since 2008, several medium-sized and even large companies have moved to the city. Despite the fact that thousands

of Detroiters annually still leave the city for good, the city's population even grew by some 7,000 in 2017. This development has been attributed to a steadily increasing number of millennials and immigrants arriving. Income, too, has risen.[18] Many wonder if the socioeconomic divergence between Detroit and its suburbs might now be shrinking. Over the years, I witnessed the visual changes as this transformation was underway. The Central Business District (CBD) and surrounding areas have seen a dramatic overhaul. Where the majority of storefronts were boarded up during my first visit in 2014, they were occupied by small businesses or undergoing construction when I last visited in 2018.

Urban agriculture has played an important role in this transformation. Community groups like the DBCFSN use the practice to build much-needed resilience, small for-profit farmers work to establish their businesses in the growing food scene, and financial elites employ crop cultivation for what I call *corporate place making*. Compuware, one of the first companies to move its headquarters to Detroit in 2008, pioneered this practice. Its leadership bought a small property outside their offices and hired a team of architects to turn it into *Lafayette Greens*, an urban community garden and park. Employees were invited to volunteer and many did so happily. "Giving back to the community" was the apparent motto. Two years later, Compuware donated *Lafayette Greens* to one of the major environmental non-profits, *The Greening of Detroit*, who now organize and pay for the upkeep of the garden. Like most urban gardens and farms, *Lafayette Greens* offers volunteer hours. Crops are almost entirely donated to local food pantries and soup kitchens.

Lafayette Greens is an exceptionally clean garden. Raised beds separated by gravel paths facilitate wheelchair accessibility. In summer, the manicured lawns are dotted with bean bags and sun beds. Food trucks cater to the lunchtime desires of corporate employees. For about 45 minutes around noon on weekdays, *Lafayette Greens* is almost busy. The bustling dies down as quickly as it begins, though, and a surprising tranquility sets into the garden that is surrounded by high rise buildings. Many of the visitors who come now are tourists. Carefully curated urban gardens like *Lafayette Greens* communicate a specific image to these visitors. Like the neatly arranged vegetable beds, Detroit's CBD is ordered and safe. Long gone are the days when it resembled a war zone. Private security companies hired by heads of companies brought peace to the area. Homelessness, drug dealing, and robberies have been successfully outsourced to other neighborhoods.

[18] Cf. Devin Culham, "More millennial are moving to metro Detroit, according to report," Metro Times (December 5, 2018), online: https://www.metrotimes.com/news-hits/archives/2018/12/05/more-millennials-are-moving-to-detroit-according-to-report (accessed March 15, 2020).

One of the primary drivers of this development has been Dan Gilbert, owner of QuickenLoans, the country's biggest online mortgage company. In 2010, Gilbert moved his company's headquarters to Detroit. In the following year, he started his real-estate firm Bedrock, with which he has been mining the city's gold. As Detroit tumbled into an economic abyss, which led to the biggest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history in 2013, Gilbert bought up vast swaths of the CBD's most undervalued and, thus, most profitable buildings and properties.[19]

Dan Gilbert represents the shiny surface of our *New Gilded Age*. Hidden underneath it are tens of thousands of Detroiters who still suffer the long-term consequences of the city's bankruptcy trial and emergency management: Water shutoffs in over 100,000 households between 2014 and 2018, an ongoing eviction crisis, and a housing demolition program (that has come under federal investigation due to rampant corruption)[20] have reshaped Detroit's social and (un-)built environment. The *Great Recession* of 2008 still deeply affects the most vulnerable members of the city's population.

Normative cultural constructions of poverty have followed me throughout this book's research and writing process. The escalation of the 2008 financial crisis in Europe honed my eyes for such constructions. I was often disgusted, if not personally offended, by media statements and casual utterances I witnessed. These painted Southern Europe and Southern Europeans as lazy, entitled, and deserving of punishment. Researching the history of urban agriculture in Detroit was full of parallels to what I was seeing at home. Fortunately, I have family and friends in many of the places that were pushed into unyielding austerity under the leadership of the German government. I say fortunately, because it offered me the opportunity to witness firsthand what austerity does to people and their environments, and how intertwined the two are. Within and beyond my academic endeavors, this helped me to fundamentally question constructions like *deserving* or *shame*, which are so deeply engrained in both German and U.S. society. Through these personal connections, I gained more than the theoretical insight that poverty's stigmata do not determine the value of people.

[19] Cf. Richard Feloni and Samantha Lee, "Billionaire Dan Gilbert has invested $5.6 billion in nearly 100 properties in Detroit — see the full map of exactly what he owns," Business Insider Australia (August 30, 2018), online: https://www.businessinsider.com.au/dan-gilbert-detroit-properties-bedrock-map-2018-8?r=US&IR=T (accessed March 16, 2020).

[20] Robert Snell, "Feds issue first charges in long-running demolition probe," Detroit News (April 8, 2019) online: https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2019/04/08/feds-unseal-charges-long-running-detroit-demolition-investigation/3404348002/ (accessed March 16, 2020).

“Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus.”
“We hope for better things; it shall arise from the ashes.”

Detroit city motto, adapted in 1805

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