Introduction ───────────────────────────

THE STORY I tell is one of a city transformed. In the 1940s, Detroit was America's "arsenal of democracy," one of the nation's fastest growing boomtowns and home to the highest-paid blue-collar workers in the United States. Today, the city is plagued by joblessness, concentrated poverty, physical decay, and racial isolation. Since 1950, Detroit has lost nearly a million people and hundreds of thousands of jobs. Vast areas of the city, once teeming with life, now stand abandoned. Prairie grass and flocks of pheasants have reclaimed what was, only fifty years ago, the most densely populated section of the city. Factories that once provided tens of thousands of jobs now stand as hollow shells, windows broken, mute testimony to a lost industrial past. Whole rows of small shops and stores are boarded up or burned out. Over ten thousand houses are uninhabited; over sixty thousand lots lie empty, marring almost every city neighborhood. Whole sections of the city are eerily apocalyptic. Over a third of the city's residents live beneath the poverty line, many concentrated in neighborhoods where a majority of their neighbors are also poor. A visit to the city's welfare offices, hospitals, and jails provides abundant evidence of the terrible costs of the city's persistent unemployment and poverty.[1]

Detroit's journey from urban heyday to urban crisis has been mirrored in other cities across the nation. Scenes of devastation and poverty are disturbingly familiar to anyone who has traveled through the streets of America's Rust Belt, the northeastern and midwestern cities that formed the backbone of American industrial might a half-century ago. The urban crisis is jarringly visible in the the shattered storefronts and fire-scarred apartments of Chicago's South and West Sides; the rubble-strewn lots of New York's Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and South Bronx; the surreal vistas of abandoned factories along the waterfronts and railways of Cleveland, Gary, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Saint Louis; the boarded-up and graffiti-covered houses of Camden, Baltimore, and Newark. Rates of poverty among black residents of these cities all range from 25 to 40 percent. With a few exceptions, all have witnessed a tremendous loss in manufacturing jobs and the emergence of a low-wage service sector. Almost all of these cities, as Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton have argued, "have large ghettos characterized by extreme segregation and spatial isolation." The faces that appear in the rundown houses, homeless shelters, and social agencies in these urban wastelands are predictably familiar. Almost all are people of color.[2]

Central-city residence, race, joblessness, and poverty have become inextricably intertwined in postindustrial urban America. In the post–World

War II period, patterns of class and racial segregation in large northern cities have persisted and hardened. Poor people have become increasingly isolated in neighborhoods with large numbers of other poor people. A growing number of urban residents, especially young African Americans, find themselves detached from the mainstream economy, often outside the labor market altogether. Unemployment and poverty are certainly not new features of American urban life. The bleak depictions of life in turn-of-the-century America offered by observers such as Jacob Riis and Robert Hunter offer powerful reminders of a troubled past. But the forms and distribution of postindustrial urban poverty are novel. In previous periods of American history, poverty and unemployment were endemic, but poor people did not experience the same degree of segregation and isolation as exists today. And in the past, most poor people were active, if irregular, participants in the labor market.[3]

Why the transformation of Detroit and other major Northern cities from magnets of opportunity to reservations for the poor? What was it that turned America's former industrial centers into economic backwaters, abandoned by manufacturers? What explains the high rates of joblessness among the urban poor? Why has discrimination by race persisted in both urban neighborhoods and workplaces? What explains the emergence of persistent, concentrated, racialized poverty in Rust Belt cities? Explanations abound for these questions, particularly in the large literature on the urban "underclass," the most influential body of scholarship to emerge on urban problems in twenty-five years. The "underclass" debate has moved in three—sometimes overlapping—directions. The first, and most influential, focuses on the behavior and values of the poor, and the role of federal social programs in fostering a culture of joblessness and dependency in inner cities. A variant, going back to the work of Daniel Patrick Moynihan and E. Franklin Frazier, emphasizes the role of family structure and unwed pregnancy in perpetuating inequality.[4] A second offers structural explanations for inequality and urban poverty. Proponents of structural explanations tend to divide among those who point to the effects of economic restructuring (following William Julius Wilson) and those who emphasize the continuing significance of racial discrimination (following Gary Orfield and Douglas Massey).[5] A third explanation focuses on politics, emphasizing the marginalization of cities in American social policy, particularly in the aftermath of the urban unrest and racial conflict of the 1960s. The "excesses" of Black Power and the rise of affirmative action fueled white suburbanization and justified a newfound white backlash against the urban poor. Implicit in this analysis is a contrast between the booming postwar years and the troubled post-1960s years, urban heyday versus urban crisis.[6]

Recent scholarship has identified important elements of the contemporary urban crisis. But what is largely missing from the "underclass" debate

is the perspective of history. My examination of Detroit in the quarter-century after World War II suggests that the origins of the urban crisis are much earlier than social scientists have recognized, its roots deeper, more tangled, and perhaps more intractable. No one social program or policy, no single force, whether housing segregation, social welfare programs, or deindustrialization, could have driven Detroit and other cities like it from their positions of economic and political dominance; there is no simple explanation for the inequality and marginality that beset the urban poor. It is only through the complex and interwoven histories of race, residence, and work in the postwar era that the state of today's cities and their impoverished residents can be fully understood and confronted.[7]

This book is a guide to the contested terrain of the postwar city, an examination of the unresolved dilemmas of housing, segregation, industrial relations, racial discrimination, and deindustrialization. I argue that the coincidence and mutual reinforcement of race, economics, and politics in a particular historical moment, the period from the 1940s to the 1960s, set the stage for the fiscal, social, and economic crises that confront urban America today. My analysis of Detroit builds on the insights of those who offer structural explanations of urban inequality. But, both in its focus on a multiplicity of structural forces, and in its location of the origins of the urban crisis in the 1940s and 1950s, my analysis diverges from much of the current literature on the "underclass." There are, of course, other approaches to the history of inequality, race, and poverty, such as the study of family structure and family strategies. The emphasis in this book on economic and spatial structures is not meant as an alternative to these approaches, but instead as a context in which they can be best understood. Economic and racial inequality constrain individual and family choices. They set the limits of human agency. Within the bounds of the possible, individuals and families resist, adapt, or succumb.

Detroit's postwar urban crisis emerged as the consequence of two of the most important, interrelated, and unresolved problems in American history: that capitalism generates economic inequality and that African Americans have disproportionately borne the impact of that inequality. The patterns of race and class inequality are by no means fixed and unchanging in American history. Detroit's racial and economic crisis emerged in a particular context—mid-twentieth-century America. Shifts at the national level in economics, race relations, and politics interacted with local forces to cause the urban crisis. In the aftermath of World War II, the post-Reconstruction racial order was in flux. Newly resurgent racial liberals and radicals battled with deeply entrenched racial conservatives over fundamental questions of rights and equality. At the same time, the national economy underwent a period of extraordinary dynamism and growth, fueling unprecedented prosperity, but also unleashing what economist Joseph Schumpeter called the

forces of "creative destruction." Northern industrial cities like Detroit were overwhelmed by the combination of racial strife and economic restructuring. Their impact played out in urban streets and workplaces. The labor and housing markets of the postwar city became arenas where inequality was shaped and contested.[8]

In the following pages, I hope to complicate the conventional narratives of post–World War II American history. The United States at midcentury was a far more complicated and troubled place than emerges from most histories and popular accounts. The nation was at a peak of economic and global strength in the 1940s and 1950s. America's aggregate rate of economic growth was nothing short of stunning. Observers marvelled—accurately—at an "affluent society" whose members could purchase a plethora of consumer goods, from cars to refrigerators to television sets. But the celebration of affluence masked significant regional variations and persistent inequality. The remarkable growth of the postwar American economy was profoundly uneven; capitalism left behind huge sections of the United States, mainly older industrial cities in the North and East and rural areas in the South and Midwest.

The cities of America's industrial heartland were the bellwethers of economic change. The rusting of the Rust Belt began neither with the much-touted stagflation and oil crisis of the 1970s, nor with the rise of global economic competition and the influx of car or steel imports. It began, unheralded, in the 1950s. As pundits celebrated America's economic growth and unprecedented prosperity, America's midwestern and northeastern cities lost hundreds of thousands of entry-level manufacturing jobs. In the industrial belt that extended from New England across New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, through the Midwest to the banks of the Mississippi, major companies reduced work forces, speeded up production, and required more overtime work. The manufacturing industries that formed the bedrock of the American economy, including textiles, electrical appliances, motor vehicles, and military hardware, automated production and relocated plants in suburban and rural areas, and increasingly in the low-wage labor markets of underdeveloped regions like the American South and the Caribbean. The restructuring of the economy proceeded with the full support and encouragement of the American government. Federal highway construction and military spending facilitated and fueled industrial growth in nonurban areas.[9]

In the midst of these wrenching changes, economic inequality remained largely off the agenda of politicians and scholars. A few astute policymakers, like Senators Paul Douglas of Illinois and Joseph Clark of Pennsylvania, recognized the corrosion beneath the facade of postwar prosperity. In the 1950s, they proposed legislation to shore up "depressed areas" of the nation. But their agenda remained on the fringes of postwar economic policy. Crit-

ics on the left, like Harvey Swados and C. L. R. James, recorded the travails of industrial workers for the few who cared to listen. The invisibility of economic hardship in the affluent age became visible in the shock that greeted the depictions of skid rows, black inner cities, and poverty-ridden Appalachian hollows in Michael Harrington's 1962 book, *The Other America*. Harrington and others identified a world that countless Americans already knew, but whose harsh realities barely penetrated the postwar veneer of consensus and civility.[10]

Setting the boundaries of debates over the economic changes that beset Detroit and the Rust Belt were several currents in national politics. First, and most important, was antiradicalism. Anticommunists silenced some of the most powerful critics of the postwar economic and social order. Red-baiting discredited and weakened progressive reform efforts. By the 1950s, unions had purged their leftist members and marginalized a powerful critique of postwar capitalism. McCarthyism also put constraints on liberal critics of capitalism. In the enforced consensus of the postwar era, it became "un-American" to criticize business decisions or to interfere with managerial prerogative or to focus on lingering class inequalities in the United States.[11]

Further limiting the political vision of policymakers and reformers in the postwar era were the conceptual tools that they used to grapple with questions of political economy. Three interrelated assumptions shaped economic and labor policy after World War II. First was the orthodoxy of neoclassical economics that interpreted the structural changes of the postwar era as temporary dislocations, and looked to national aggregate indicators of economic prosperity rather than to regional variations. Second was the emerging labor relations "manpower" theory that explained unemployment as the result of individual educational or behavioral deficiencies, and deemphasized the structural causes of joblessness. Third was a fundamental optimism about the capacity of the private sector to absorb surplus labor. The reality of rusting cities in the Northeast and Midwest challenged these orthodoxies, but those who bucked mainstream economic and labor market theory, or spoke pessimistically about the economy, remained on the political margins. The result is that urban economic decline in the postwar years has remained largely absent from historical accounts of the 1940s and 1950s.[12]

The problems that beset Detroit were not solely economic. The fate of Northern industrial cities was fundamentally entangled with the troubled history of race in twentieth-century America. By 1960, a majority of America's African American population lived in cities, most of them north of the Mason-Dixon line. The steady loss of manufacturing jobs in northeastern and midwestern cities occurred at the same time that millions of African Americans migrated to the urban North, driven from the rural South by disruptions in the agricultural economy and lured by the promise of freedom and opportunity denied to them in Jim Crow's last, desperate days. The

complex and pervasive racial discrimination that greeted black laborers in the "land of hope" ensured that they would suffer disproportionately the effects of deindustrialization and urban decline. For a large number of African Americans, the promise of steady, secure, and relatively well-paid employment in the North proved illusory.[13]

The most visible and intractable manifestation of racial inequality in the postwar city was residential segregation. Blacks in Detroit and other northern metropolises found themselves entrapped in rapidly expanding, yet persistently isolated urban ghettos. Despite the supposedly liberal mores of the North, despite successful court challenges to housing market discrimination, despite open housing advocacy and legislation, northern cities experienced rates of segregation that barely changed between the 1940s and the present. Segregated housing compounded the urban crisis. The combination of deindustrialization, white flight, and hardening ghettoization proved devastating. Residence in the inner city became a self-perpetuating stigma. Increasing joblessness, and the decaying infrastructure of inner-city neighborhoods, reinforced white stereotypes of black people, families, and communities.[14]

Racial conflict and tension surfaced as a persistent refrain in the lives of urban Americans in the postwar era. Discrimination by race was a central fact of life in the postwar city. But the dimensions, significance, and very meaning of race differed depending on its cultural, political, and economic context. Relationships across racial lines took myriad forms and had differing consequences. Many scholars have painted the history of racial discrimination with broad brush strokes. Race, in many accounts, is a transhistorical constant rather than a historical variable. Racism is portrayed as a pathological condition, an unchanging part of white culture. But the word "racism" oversimplifies what was a complicated and multifaceted reality. Race relations in the postwar city were the product of a variety of racial beliefs and practices that changed greatly in the postwar period.[15]

Racial ideology, a shifting and fluid popular vernacular of race, served as the backdrop to the relationship between blacks and whites in the postwar city. Discriminatory attitudes and actions were constructed and justified in part by the images of African Americans to which white city-dwellers were exposed. In mid-twentieth-century Detroit, as in the rest of the nation, racial identities rested on widely held assumptions about the inferior intelligence of blacks, notions that blacks were physiologically better suited for certain types of work, and stereotypes about black licentiousness, sexual promiscuity, laziness, and dependence. But Detroiters were a part of a national culture that began to project contradictory images of African Americans for mass consumption. Perceptions of racial difference and inferiority were informed by music, radio, and movies, in countless ways from the smiling face of Aunt Jemima to the shuffling of Amos 'n Andy, to the crooning voice

of Chubby Checker, to the brawny arms of boxer Joe Louis, to the celluloid images of Sidney Poitier and Bessie Smith. On the other side was the persistent association of whiteness with Americanism, hard work, sexual restraint, and independence. These assumptions about racial difference were nourished by a newly assertive whiteness, born of the ardent desire of the "not-yet-white ethnics" (many of them Roman Catholic, second- and third-generation southern and eastern European immigrants) to move into the American mainstream. To be fully American was to be white. Popular images of whiteness and blackness—and the ways in which they changed—influenced the day-to-day encounters between whites and blacks at work and on city streets.[16]

Perceptions of racial differences were not, I argue, wholly, or even primarily, the consequences of popular culture. If they were, they would not have had such extraordinary staying power. In the postwar city, blackness and whiteness assumed a spatial definition. The physical state of African American neighborhoods and white neighborhoods in Detroit reinforced perceptions of race. The completeness of racial segregation made ghettoization seem an inevitable, natural consequence of profound racial differences. The barriers that kept blacks confined to racially isolated, deteriorating, inner-city neighborhoods were largely invisible to white Detroiters. To the majority of untutored white observers, visible poverty, overcrowding, and deteriorating houses were signs of individual moral deficiencies, not manifestations of structural inequalities. White perceptions of black neighborhoods provided seemingly irrefutable confirmation of African American inferiority and set the terms of debates over the inclusion of African Americans in the city's housing and labor markets.[17]

Perhaps most important in shaping the concept of race in the postwar period, I argue, were local and national politics. Race was as much a political as a social construction. The place of race both in party politics and in government policies was in flux in the postwar era. In the aftermath of the struggle against fascism, racialist ideologies lost their official credibility. Beginning in World War II, the federal government promoted a pluralist vision of nationhood that emphasized integration rather than inherent difference. At the same time, the balance of power in national and local politics began to shift as the black population moved northward and became an important part of the Democratic constituency for the first time. Wielding the growing clout of the African American vote, newly empowered civil rights groups demanded the attention of Democratic politicians. Black activists gained new access to government and pursued an aggressive judicial and legislative strategy to eliminate racial inequality. Yet government policies, including Social Security, welfare, and jobs programs, also reinforced and reconstructed racial stereotypes and inequalities. Most importantly, government housing programs perpetuated racial divisions by placing public housing in

already poor urban areas and bankrolling white suburbanization through discriminatory housing subsidies. The liberal state communicated an ambivalent message on matters of race that had a powerful impact on individual and group interactions at the local level.[18]

Overall, political activity affected a gradual, if unsteady, shift in the boundaries of what was acceptable racial practice in the postwar years. But the changes were hard fought and bitterly contested. For most of the period between the 1930s and the mid-1960s, nominal liberals dominated the governing coalition in Washington, in northern industrial states, and in major cities. The New Deal coalition was forged in working-class cities like Detroit, and urban elected officials and voters played a crucial role in implementing New Deal policies. Liberal politicians won loyalty by promising their constituents that the government would actively protect their economic and social security. White and black Americans took the promise of liberalism seriously and mobilized in the 1940s and 1950s to assert their rights as citizens.

But the New Deal state was riddled with ambiguities and contradictions that left room for opposing interpretations of what constituted proper government action. Most threatening to the seeming unity of the New Deal order were unresolved questions of racial identity and racial politics, dilemmas that would become inseparable from the mission of liberalism itself. Part the story of the African American challenge to liberalism is well known: civil rights groups in the 1950s launched a fierce attack on Jim Crow in the South. But at the same time, the combination of deindustrialization and black population growth upended the racial order of Detroit and other northern cities. The disruption of old patterns of work, residence, and race coincided with a massive political challenge to the structures of racial inequality nationwide. The history of race relations and civil rights in the North remains, however, largely unexamined by historians. Racial tensions, prejudices, and debates over civil rights played out on the shop floors and in the streets of the urban north, with consequences as far-reaching as those of the southern civil rights movement. Two visions of the polity came into collision in Detroit, both rooted in a newfound rights consciousness at the center of postwar liberalism. African Americans forcefully asserted their rights to equal opportunity in employment and housing. But they faced opposition from working- and middle-class whites who also claimed the mantle of the authentic New Deal state. White Detroiters expected the state to protect the privileges associated with property ownership and race. Debates over housing and race had profound ramifications for the fate of federal policy in the city for the next half-century. The rhetoric, the battles, and the compromises of the 1940s and 1950s, in Detroit and all over the nation, set the terms for the debate over social policy into the Great Society years and beyond.[19]

The convergence of the disparate forces of deindustrialization, racial transformation, and political and ideological conformity laid the groundwork for the urban crisis in Detroit and its northern counterparts. But the emphasis in this study on structural forces shaping the city should not obscure the role of human agency and contingency in the city's development. In many social-scientific studies of American cities, urban problems seem almost inevitable. The shape of the postwar city, I contend, is the result of political and economic decisions, of choices made and not made by various institutions, groups, and individuals. Industrial location policy is not solely the result of technological imperatives; it is the result of corporate policies to minimize union strength, to avoid taxes, and to exploit new markets. Racially segregated neighborhoods are not alone the foreordained consequence of centuries of American racial prejudice; rather, they are the result of the actions of the federal and local governments, real estate agents, individual home buyers and sellers, and community organizations. Economic and social structures act as parameters that limit the range of individual and collective decisions. The consequences of hundreds of individual acts or of collective activity, however, gradually strengthen, redefine, or weaken economic and social structures. The relationship between structure and agency is dialectical and history is the synthesis.[20]

The ideologies and actions of myriad groups shaped the evolution of postwar Detroit. Corporate executives and managers who controlled the city's industry determined the range of employment opportunities through their labor policies and their long-term corporate planning strategies. They had a disproportionate influence on the city's development because of their economic power: a single corporate decision could affect thousands of workers. Company hiring and upgrading policies established and reinforced discriminatory patterns in the workplace. The introduction of new technology and decisions about plant size, expansion, and relocation affected the city's labor market and reshaped the economic geography of the Detroit region.

Though less powerful than their bosses, labor unions and their rank-and-file members also had a hand in Detroit's development. By the 1940s, Detroit was a bastion of industrial unionism, home to the mighty United Automobile Workers, one of the nation's most powerful and influential labor organizations. Over half of Detroit's workers belonged to unions in 1950. Union victories on such issues as work rules, wages, and seniority advanced the economic security and employment stability of the city's unionized workers. At the same time, however, unions often reinforced or quietly acquiesced in employers' discriminatory hiring and upgrading policies, and only seldom challenged management decisions on plant location and expansion that had significant long-term ramifications for Detroit's workers.

In the public sector, federal, state, and local governments buttressed corporate policies through the allocation of resources. Decisions about spend-

ing for defense production and transportation profoundly altered the shape of Detroit in the boom years during and after the Second World War. State and local taxation policies influenced corporate decisions on plant location and movement. Most importantly, because most federal urban programs were administered locally and relied on the support of local constituencies, urban politicians, bankers, developers, real estate brokers, and citizens groups all used federal and local housing policies to reconfigure urban geography by class and race in the postwar era.

Individual white Detroiters challenged and reformulated local and federal policies both in the workplace and in their neighborhoods, and contributed to the racial and socioeconomic division of metropolitan Detroit. Workers who benefited from the systematic exclusion of blacks from white jobs often promoted discriminatory policies in the workplace. White working-class and middle-class homeowners played a crucial role in the racial division of the city. Detroit's neighborhoods became a fiercely contested terrain as the city's black population expanded. Through collective organization to resist black mobility, white homeowners redrew the city's racial boundaries and reinforced patterns of racial inequality.

Black Detroiters were far less powerful than employers, white workers and homeowners, and the federal government as actors shaping the social and economic geography of Detroit. They were not, however, powerless. In the postwar years, black homeowners and black renters, the working class and middle class, sometimes collaborated with white organizations, sometimes unwittingly abetted racial divisions, and often challenged patterns of segregation and discrimination. Black organizations such as the Urban League and the NAACP confronted employers, unions, and government agencies over the issue of equal opportunity in the labor and housing markets, and succeeded in expanding the horizons of opportunity for black Detroiters. But growing class divisions within the city's black population inhibited the efforts of black reform groups to address the plight of poor and unemployed Detroit residents. Well-to-do black homeowners, like their white counterparts, fled to outlying sections of the city, and contributed to the residential segregation of the black poor. Black homeowners and white homeowners also joined forces to oppose publicly funded housing for the poor.

The intricate dynamics of personal and group interaction—and their interplay with structural forces—are most visible only at the local level. I have chosen a case study precisely because it allows for a rich description and analysis of the processes that are all too often left in the realm of generalizations such as discrimination, deindustrialization, and racism.[21] Detroit is a logical site for such a close analysis. Its mid-twentieth-century history was shaped by the interplay of the mighty forces of racial conflict and economic change. A magnet for black migrants from the South, Detroit became a test-

ing ground for race relations, a place wracked with racial tensions and conflicts. In Detroit, as in every other Northern city with a sizeable black population, conflicts over race and housing moved to the center of local political debates. Detroit's whites, like their counterparts in Chicago, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, and Trenton, resisted the African American migration regardless of the size of the influx of black newcomers. Elected officials in almost every major northern city grappled with public policies, from housing to antidiscrimination laws, intended to address the problems generated by racial conflict.[22]

As a major manufacturing center, the headquarters of the automobile industry, and a hub of union activism, Detroit offers a lens into the dynamics of American industrial capitalism. The economic fate of the automobile industry in Detroit was not simply a matter of local peculiarity or local interest. Automobile and related industries led the American industrial economy after World War II, accounting for about one-sixth of the country's employment at midcentury. In the 1940s and 1950s, the American auto industry was at its peak of profitability and power, still unchallenged by foreign imports and the management crises that would plague it in the 1970s and 1980s. Because of its dominance in auto production, Detroit was the center of a regional web of industries vital to the nation's economy. What befell Detroit directly affected other major manufacturing sectors—steel in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Youngstown, and Gary; rubber and tires in Akron; machine tools in Cincinnati; glass and electronics in Toledo and Dayton; and more autos in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and South Bend. When Detroit sneezed, the adage went, other cities caught pneumonia. In addition, Detroit was home to a wide range of other industries, including chemicals, steel, pharmaceuticals, construction, and brewing, in which the dynamics of economic restructuring and race played out in ways that allow for comparisons with other cities.[23]

To view Detroit (or any place) as typical would be erroneous. Much about the city's economy, most notably its dependence on manufacturing employment, distinguished it from other cities with more diverse economic bases. Detroit was not a global city like New York or Los Angeles, where in the 1970s and 1980s, a large, internationally linked information and service sector emerged to replace manufacturing jobs. And in some cities, most notably New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, the presence of other minority groups, particularly Hispanics and Asians, complicated racial politics in ways that diverge from the experience of Detroit, which had a small Mexican-American population, a tiny Asian enclave, and hardly any Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, or Cubans. The presence of new immigrants, particularly in the last twenty years, has undoubtedly complicated the histories of some other cities. But because the color line between black and white has remained America's most salient social division, the experiences of Detroit

and other cities with sizeable African American populations share much in common. In the end, I contend that the differences between Detroit and other Rust Belt cities are largely a matter of degree, not a matter of kind.

As with any case study, it is important to be attentive to differences and commonalities. At appropriate points, primarily in the notes, I offer readers the opportunity to read further and consider comparisons between Detroit and other cities. Since the history of postwar America, and its cities, remains largely unwritten, many of the larger arguments in this book await the arrival of future books and articles. It is only with many more detailed studies that we will be able to make thorough comparisons and test the arguments that I advance here.

One finding pervades the thousands of letters, pamphlets, newspaper stories, census statistics, government documents, maps, workplace studies, investigative reports, survey data, organizational records, and memoirs that provide the basis for my chronicle of postwar Detroit. The fate of the city is the consequence of the unequal distribution of power and resources. Inequality is by no means a new feature in history—but its manifestations differ widely in different places and different times. What follows is a social and political history of inequality in a twentieth-century city. How those residents of the city who have little access to political power survive, resist, adapt, and gain access to power is a story that I also touch upon. For the actions of the poor can be fully understood only in the context of the larger structures that limit their choices and constrain their options. This book by no means offers a complete history of postwar Detroit; rather, it offers a starting point for an examination of the causes of the vexing problems of urban poverty, inequality, and urban decline, and a tale of the struggles for equality and survival in the postindustrial American city.