

Detroit: A City in Transition

Detroit is a city that has been shaped by many local, national, and global trends. The early 20th Century saw Detroit's transformation into the "Motor City". Henry Ford's invention of the assembly line and the Model T car, coupled with The Great Migration, in which millions of southern Blacks filled industrial northern cities, including Detroit, set in place the dynamics that would affect Detroit to this day. Detroit quickly became not only an industrial powerhouse, but a cultural one, too. Berry Gordy's "Motown Records" led to the nation's acceptance and desire for Black singers during the 1960's, in which the country experienced great racial tensions. Despite Detroit's previous glory, somehow over the course of a few decades Detroit evolved into what it is today, one of the poorest cities in the US that has just emerged from the largest municipal bankruptcy in the country's history. Yet, Detroit is experiencing an urban revival that has the potential to bring back at least some of its former prestige amongst American cities. Despite Detroit's numerous challenges, positive advancements seem to be on the horizon.

Detroit's epic downfall, which was primarily the product of racial tensions and the evolution of the auto industry, led to many of the issues that it faces today. For much of the 20th century, Detroit truly embodied the "American Dream". If one was willing to work hard, then they could land a job in one of the city's many auto factories and become part of the nation's strong middle class. The city grew, and would eventually fall, with the auto industry. The city's population peaked in the 1950's, and many would argue that the economy did as well. However, starting in the mid-20th century, the auto industry began building factories in Detroit's suburbs, as well some other Midwestern states, marking the beginning of Detroit's long decline. This trend continued into the subsequent decades as the American auto industry as a whole began to falter. The 1973 Energy Crisis, which OPEC had incited, caused many of the large, gas-guzzling

American cars to lose favor with the American consumer, and thus hurt the sales of American car manufacturers. The 1980's would mark the rise of Japanese and other foreign car manufacturers, which would further cut American auto jobs. This would eventually culminate with the auto industry's current situation of most jobs gone overseas and domestic jobs shifting away from The City of Detroit, thus crushing Detroit's economy and the livelihoods of many of the city's inhabitants. Today, Detroit is full of abandoned auto plants and unemployed auto workers. Yet, the fall of the auto industry was not solely responsible for Detroit's downfall. Racial tensions, which really began as soon as Blacks moved to the city, were a major contributor to Detroit's current situation. These tensions culminated in the 1967 Detroit Riot, in which numerous buildings were destroyed. By this time, "White Flight," in which Whites moved out of the city and into the suburbs, had already begun, but the majority of the Whites that remained soon left after this riot. This was a major contributor to the city's economic as well as population decline from about 1.86 million people in 1950 to around 700,000 in 2012 (<http://www.forbes.com/pictures/emeh45mifi/a-declining-population-in-a-widespread-city-17/>). Today, many homes that were burnt down in the riot remain as they were almost 50 years ago, with just the foundations remaining. After both the decline of the auto industry and the exodus of the city's White population, Detroit is experiencing major problems. The city is full of blight in the form of abandoned office, residential, and industrial buildings. The police and fire departments are underfunded and overwhelmed with complaints, leading to long waiting times for help. Crime is abundant with the city having the highest violent crime rate in 2012 out of any US city with a population of over 200,000 people (<http://www.forbes.com/pictures/emeh45mifi/still-burdened-by-crime-17/>). Additionally, poverty

is rampant with as 2010 unemployment rate of 23% (<http://www.bls.gov/lau/lacilg10.htm>).

Therefore, the decline of the auto industry and racial tensions have led to Detroit's downfall.

Today, there are many positive trends underway in Detroit that give many people optimistic views of the future. Firstly, real estate prices are extremely cheap, with the government auctioning off homes for as little as \$500. This gives many people the ability to afford a home to live in, which is a central component of the "American Dream". Additionally, many businesspeople, such as Dan Gilbert and his company, Quicken Loans, are bringing jobs back to downtown Detroit. Furthermore, many small business have been created and are forming a local and sustainable economy. Also, many community service organizations, such as Repair the World, are working in Detroit to try and improve the city. Despite all of the blight, there are clear indications of a turnaround. As one walks downtown, it is common to see an abandoned building, an occupied building, and a building under renovation, all right next to each other. In addition to this, Detroit has just emerged from bankruptcy, giving it the ability to start afresh. Moreover, there is a lot of positive energy in Detroit, with many people optimistic about its future. Finally, given that Detroit has essentially hit rock bottom, there is only one way to go, up. Therefore, Detroit is a city in transition and the coming years should be filled with excitement as the world watches its comeback.