

https://dspace.org/

# A tale of two cities: a comparison between the Detroit and Johannesburg urban experience

**Stainer, Duncan Charles**

**2014-04-03**
http://hdl.handle.net10539/14491

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

A Tale of Two Cities

# A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE DETROIT AND JOHANNESBURG URBAN EXPERIENCE.

Duncan Charles Stainer

A Tale of Two Cities

# A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE DETROIT AND JOHANNESBURG URBAN EXPERIENCE.

Duncan Charles Stainer

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Architecture, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Science in Building in the specialised field of Property Development and Management.

Johannesburg, 1999.

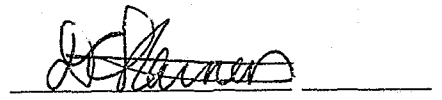
DECLARATION:

I DECLARE THAT THIS IS MY OWN UNAIDED WORK SAVE INSOFAR AS INDICATED IN THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REFERENCES.

IT IS BEING SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE IN BUILDING IN THE SPECIALISED FIELD OF PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG.

IT HAS NOT BEEN SUBMITTED BEFORE FOR ANY DEGREE OR EXAMINATION IN ANY OTHER UNIVERSITY.

SIGNATURE OF CANDIDATE



13 DAY OF January 1999

# Synopsis:

The two cities, Johannesburg and Detroit, having experienced decentralization together with ubiquitous inner city blight, form the topic of this discourse. The historical backgrounds of both cities are important in that both developed as nineteenth century industrial towns and the origins of decentralization can be traced to the reaction against the overcrowding and environmental pollution which accompanied the Industrial Revolution. Then again, both cities have experienced problems of a racial nature.

The causes of decentralization in both cities are analysed and found to be remarkably similar. Both Johannesburg and Detroit, as car-based cities developed multiple suburban nodes. Firstly, the preferred model for living became the suburban house on its own plot of ground. Secondly, businesses moved into low-rise offices in landscaped garden settings, convenient to where people lived. Thirdly, the preferred form of shopping became the shopping mall with ample parking and safe inner pedestrian walkways. The exodus of middle class residents, together with businesses, resulted in both inner cities becoming poorer, more crime ridden and increasingly populated by disadvantaged black people. These urban realities are not unique to Johannesburg and Detroit, but are modern trends which have affected many cities around the world.

The conclusion discusses the current literature on decentralization and the debate central to urban planning, that between decentralization on the one hand and on the other hand, concentration and the compact city. Solutions to Johannesburg's increasingly impoverished inner city are offered. Considering the similarities between the Johannesburg and Detroit urban experience, it would be an easy option to seek for similar solutions. However, although Johannesburg's economic decline may be compared to Detroit's, it is important to realize that American solutions may not be relevant to the Johannesburg situation.

In most American cities, including Detroit, residents outside the original city's boundaries established separate local governments. Unable to tap the area of greater economic growth, (its suburbs) Detroit became increasingly poorer. Many American urban experts such as David Rusk argue that the surest way to reverse patterns of economic decline is to create metropolitan governments. The restructuring of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council and its four substructures into a single megacity will result in such a metropolitan government and will allow for more money to be allocated to the inner city. On a cautionary note, the megacity may not necessarily result in more efficient government.

Unlike Detroit, Johannesburg's inner city has seen a substantial increase in its residential population. Thus the greatest urban challenge facing Johannesburg lies in its ability to accommodate its rapidly expanding black population. It is vitally important that the inner city develop a framework of social housing to supplement the national housing shortage. Office buildings standing empty in the CBD may be converted to residential use. Then again, tenants of blocks of flats may pool their individual government housing subsidies and buy the buildings which they would then all jointly own. In many cases this is already happening.

But if Johannesburg's inner city is not to be become a urban ghetto, middle class black families will have to be encouraged to reside in the city. The two preconditions for attracting middle class residents to the inner city are firstly, to provide a quality education for their children and secondly, to provide a safer and more attractive environment. Obviously adequate city management, encompassing clean streets, better policing and greater control of informal traders is

important. A more attractive environment would also ensure that the CBD remains a major retail centre for the African market .

However, the successful renewal of the inner city depends on an economic upliftment programme rather than on a better city management programme. It may be necessary to accept that while it is extremely unlikely that the more affluent suburbanites will repopulate the inner city, it is equally unlikely that leading businesses will move back into the CBD. But the compactness of the Johannesburg city centre with its plentiful supply of cheap office space and empty warehouses is ideally suited to promoting small and medium black businesses. Ultimately, the revitalization of the inner city depends on improving the economic position of the residents.

It is important that there is sound city leadership and co-operation between the private sector, metropolitan government and local communities. Unfortunately, in contrast to America, South Africa is unlikely to have surplus public funds available to subsidize significant urban development. However, with insight and realistic goals, Johannesburg's inner city may become once again a vibrant and dynamic centre.

# Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor R. Schloss, of the Department of Building Science, University of the Witwatersrand for his help and guidance.

I would also like to thank the following people who kindly gave of their time and allowed me to interview them:

J.F.Bihl, (Chairman) Director Ampros Developments Limited

F.Dielwart, Senior Project Manager for Johnnic Property Developments Limited

N.Fraser, Executive Director of the Central Johannesburg Partnership (CJP)

R.Fee, Chairman of RFB Consulting Architects

In particular I would like to thank Professor R.Tomlinson of the Graduate School of Public and Development Management, University of the Witwatersrand, who not only allowed me to interview him but also provided me with new insights and allowed me access to some of his as yet unpublished papers.

# CONTENTS


## 1 INTRODUCTION

## 2 DECENTRALIZATION IN DETROIT

2.1 Historical Background
2.2 Causes of Decentralization in Detroit

- 2.2.1 Transportation and Technology
- 2.2.2 Emancipation of Women
- 2.2.3 Building Obsolescence/Abandonment
- 2.2.4 Crime
- 2.2.5 Education
- 2.2.6 Retail
- 2.2.7 Politics

2.3 Attempts at urban renewal

- 2.3.1 The redevelopment of blighted residential areas
- 2.3.2 Renewal of the central business district or CBD

## 3 DECENTRALIZATION IN JOHANNESBURG

3.1 Historical Background
3.2 Causes of Decentralization in Johannesburg

- 3.2.1 Transportation and Technology
- 3.2.2 Emancipation of Women
- 3.2.3 Building Obsolescence/Abandonment
- 3.2.4 Crime
- 3.2.5 Education
- 3.2.6 Retail
- 3.2.7 Politics

3.3 Attempts at urban renewal

- 3.3.1 The redevelopment of blighted residential areas
- 3.3.2 Renewal of the central business district or CBD

## 4 CONCLUSION

## 5 BIBLIOGRAPHY

# 1 Introduction:

This discourse has as its topic, decentralization, the process that has changed the fabric of Johannesburg and in particular, its city centre, over the last thirty years. I also include a discussion of an American city as many American cities started to suffer urban decay long before Johannesburg. Detroit was singled out for the case study as in many ways it shows a remarkable similarity to Johannesburg. Like our South African city, it developed as a late nineteenth century industrial town and has similarly experienced problems of a racial nature. In Detroit many regeneration experiments were undertaken by the city government and private enterprise to try and stop urban decay. The successes and failures of these interventions can be fruitfully examined to ascertain whether we in South Africa can learn from the America urban planning experience.

Decentralization is a modern phenomenon that has affected many cities around the world. It refers to the movement of people and businesses out of the old downtown area to the residential suburbs on the periphery of the city. Since the 1960s Johannesburg has experienced this typical urban exodus which in its case has led simultaneously to ubiquitous inner city blight. Today a large number of people no longer work or shop in the city centre but in one of the many developing commercial nodes which have mushroomed around the edge of the city. While Garreau describes these new Edge Cities in America as follows, he could almost be writing about decentralization in Johannesburg:

*"Every single American city is growing in the fashion of Los Angeles, with multiple urban cores. These new hearts of our civilization in which the majority of metropolitan Americans now work and around which we live look not at all like our old downtowns. Buildings rarely rise shoulder to shoulder, as in Chicago's loop. Instead their broad low outlines dot the landscape like mushrooms, separated by green bands and parking lots. Their office towers frequently guarded by trees, gaze at one another from respectful distances through bands of glass that mirror the sun in blue or silver or green or gold."* (Garreau 1991 :3).

Johannesburg was the result of the discovery of gold in 1886. From the beginning its history was linked to its development as an industrial metropolis. *"Johannesburg was the progeny of nineteenth century Industrial Revolution no less than Manchester in the first quarter or Chicago in the last. Financial speculation and gold bullion for the world market, were principal preconditions for Johannesburg's existence."* (Chipkin 1993:5). The historical movement of people in the nineteenth century to industrial cities like Johannesburg and Detroit was not because of the fascination of the rural dweller with urban life, but was related to the more mundane issue of survival in terms of the opportunity to work. This is the legacy of both cities, but Johannesburg, like all South African cities in the past, was shaped by institutionalised racial segregation, a social system which later became known as the notorious apartheid system.

Commentary on decentralization has been characterised by opposing attitudes to this phenomenon. It has recently been argued that urban decay is a modern metropolis phenomenon that should be accepted, that the inner city should simply be abandoned and its population

settled elsewhere in suburbs that eventually grow so big that they become Edge Cities. Silverman asks, *"Should we repair the edge? Re-compact the city? Create new versions of old cities on the peripheries of existing metropolitan regions? Or come to terms with, and accept the fragmentation at the end of the twentieth century. This dissertation argues for the latter."*(Silverman 1996: 2). Bradbury refers to a common belief that the old downtown did not keep pace with the car, the garage and motorway. *"Some believing that large cities are obsolete in an age of automobiles and electronic communications argue that public policies should help big cities decline gracefully and should not encourage their revitalisation."*( Bradbury 1982 : vii). However it must be remembered that some of the most ardent proponents of this arguments are property developers interested in luring businesses to decentralized office nodes. *"If the Pope shaped Rome, the Doge Venice and Baron Houssman the grand boulevards of the Champs – Elysees, the marketplace rules Edge City."* (Garreau 1991:223). The issue is whether the market place is an appropriate way for people to communicate how they really want to live?

The above argument may lead one to accept some aspects of inner city decay but we neglect the phenomenon as a whole at our peril. It is naïve, for example, to think that allowing Johannesburg's urban centre to degenerate into a "crime and grime, no-go area" ruled by gangsters would have no impact on the wealthier Edge Cities to the north of the city. Uncontrolled urban sprawl creates its own problems, and results in the rural environment surrounding the city being threatened, as unrestricted residential development is incompatible with the preservation of nature. When in 1967 man landed on the moon, the image of our planet relayed from space showed a small and finite system, frighteningly vulnerable. At the end of the twentieth century, there is no longer a belief in the inevitability of progress; man's lot may be improved by technology but only in harmony with nature, of which he is an integral part. London's environmentally protected green belt, which runs from twelve to twenty miles wide was specifically created by planners to limit urban sprawl. So in contrast to the lassè faire attitude of those who would allow the inner city to decay there are those who contend that it must be aided in a process of rejuvenation. After all European inner cities are still a thriving part of European life. However, it must be acknowledged that it would be impossible for us to create a traditional London or Paris. Johannesburg has no legacy of great art museums, historical buildings or a scenic river at its heart. Any notion of central Johannesburg as a major tourist centre will not work.

Another prevailing view is that inner city blight is an unavoidable cycle that ebbs and flows like similar cycles in economic development. According to this theory, movement away from the city centre must inevitably result in a return to this area. As the exodus to Edge Cities on the periphery accelerates, so traffic congestion problems and rental costs for office space increase in these areas, allowing the central business district (CBD) to once again become competitive and commercially attractive. Peter Reynolds, the senior partner in the corporate law firm Webber Wentzel Bowens (one of the two last remaining big law firms in the CBD) says the company decided about 18 months ago to move north. *"But having taken that decision, we looked at it more maturely and decided we should not be hasty. If you move north, your rentals are substantially higher and you also have the difficulty of traffic congestion which strangely enough you don't have in the CBD."* (Reynolds, Sunday Times, Metro, Mar 8, 1998:11). Some cities do have cyclical episodes of urban decay and redevelopment, but there are other examples however, (Detroit is one such place) that have shown no signs of urban renewal.

Decentralization in Johannesburg is often viewed by theorists from a purely commercial perspective. These commentaries have emphasised the desertion of businesses from the CBD for the office complexes of Rosebank, Sandton, and Midrand. In these analyses the social predicaments of inner city residential areas such as Hillbrow, Berea, and Joubert Park are largely ignored. These areas however form an integral part of the general problem of decentralization. When Le Corbusier was building his *Machines for living* in Paris and later his *Unite d'Habitation* (1952) in Marseilles, Johannesburg architects were building similar mass housing blocks in downtown Johannesburg. Unlike Detroit, Johannesburg centre has seen a dramatic increase in its residential population but the influx into the inner city has been mostly of poor blacks, all of them prey to rising crime and deteriorating slum conditions. For the inner city to have any chance of renewal, the uplifting of these residential areas will have to be addressed.

The exodus of middle class residents together with businesses and industries has resulted in the inner cities of both Detroit and Johannesburg being in a similar state of decline. Both inner cities are marked by the flight of prestigious firms, empty office spaces, a declining tax base and poorer residents. Considering the similarities between the two cities it would be an easy option to seek for similar solutions. However the differences between the American urban experience and that of a developing country like South Africa are enormous. Richard Tomlinson warns in an article in Business Day that although Johannesburg's economic decline may be compared to an American city, like Detroit, it is important to realize that the problems of Johannesburg's city centre must be viewed from an African perspective. (Tomlinson, Business day, Feb 25, 1998:14). In the case of both cities, existing metropolitan sprawl cannot be unmade, indeed it is doubtful if this would be beneficial. However solutions to the increasingly impoverished city centres may be offered. The focus of this discourse is on the city centre. The importance of the phenomena of black urbanization which has accelerated since South Africa's new democracy, and the social and political problems which accompany it, cannot be over emphasized.

Deputy President Thabo Mbeki believes Africa to be on the verge of a renaissance, after three decades of decline. (Mbeki, Business day, Aug 8, 1998:7). He and many other South Africans would like to see the Johannesburg city centre as the commercial powerhouse of an African continent. There is no shortage of ideas for Johannesburg's revival.[1] Various private and public sector initiatives have been launched over the past few years. One such initiative is Mayivuke (Awake Johannesburg), an inner city vision and development strategy set up by Thabo Mbeki together with private sector and local government groups. Richard Tomlinson maintains that Mayivuke focused on how better to manage the city rather than addressing problems of economic upliftment. *"Social control – regaining control of the streets – was the dominant issue. The question they failed to address was economic inclusion."* (Tomlinson 1998:3). For inner city visioning exercises such as Mayivuke to succeed, depends largely on whether the residents have employment. The wellbeing of all cities in South Africa in fact depends to a great degree on a vibrant South African economy.

[1] These ideas will be dealt with in the main discourse on Johannesburg

# 2 Decentralization in Detroit:

## 2.1 Historical Background:

Detroit is one of the world's great industrial centres. More cars are manufactured in the Detroit area than anywhere else in the world. It is the largest city in the state of Michigan and the sixth largest in the United States. In French *detroit* means "the straits" and this refers to its position on both sides of the narrow channel which connects Lake St Clair and Lake Erie. The Wyandot Indians were the original inhabitants in the region. In 1701, a group of French settlers led by Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac built Fort Pontchartrain on the north bank of the Detroit River, which became an important fur-trading post. The British gained control of the fort in 1760 during the French and Indian war. During the American War of Independence, the British built Fort Lernoult where present day Detroit is situated. The war ended in 1783, but the British wanted to keep their valuable fur trade in the Michigan region and refused to surrender Fort Lernoult until 1796. (World Book, Vol 5, 1980:138).

In 1806, Detroit was incorporated into a city. In 1825 the Erie canal was constructed which linked Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, a prodigious engineering feet which linked Detroit to the Atlantic Ocean, and the port of New York. This knocked the travel and freight times to New York by a tenth, and a railroad constructed in 1848 cut the travel time between Detroit and Chicago by two-thirds. This decrease in travelling time allowed Detroit to develop into one of the largest industrial cities in what was then the Northwest. (Garreau 1991:106).

Detroit has a reputation for the mass manufacture of automobiles. This trend was pioneered by Henry Ford (1863-1947), who built his first gasoline engine in 1896 and a decade later organised the Ford Motor company. *"The task he set himself was to design and manufacture an automobile which was easy to drive, safe, totally reliable, made of the strongest and best materials, and whose price could be progressively reduced by economies of scale. The result was the Model T of 1908."* (Johnson 1997:504). Ford's invention of the moving assembly line in 1913 adumbrated modern assembly lines all over the world. Ford realised that Big Business, with its *"economies of scale"*, could lead to even bigger business provided it shared its profits with workers. In 1914 when skilled workers were averaging $ 11.00 a week, he announced that he would pay his employees $ 5.00 for an eight hour day so that they could all buy his model Ts. The idea was new and it worked. (Johnson 1997 : 504).

This kind of pay drew migrants from as far as Eastern Europe, Palestine and the American Deep South. The migration of black Americans from the Southern States to the North started in 1915 due to a poor cotton crop in the South, and the simultaneous demand for unskilled labour in the heavy industrial centres of the North. This was a movement out of feudalism into the Industrial Revolution. *"We replaced the cities the Founding Fathers knew with the metropolis of the railroad, the factory and the steam engine. Immigrants flocked to the tenements, apartment blocks and boarding houses of these new places, packing themselves together in neighborhoods huddled as close as possible to places of work."* (Garreau 1991: 105). Detroit

quadr[illegible] population in only twenty years, from 285 000 at the turn of the century to well over a [illegible] by 1921. (Garreau 1991: 104) This mass movement of rural Americans to the big city [illegible] overcrowding and social problems. In 1925 there was an outbreak of serious race rioting in Detroit. The mayor of Detroit named an interracial committee that made a probing study of race problems in the city. *"The chief difficulty the committee found, was overcrowding, an inevitable result of the 800 per cent increase of the city's non-white population within a decade."*(McKelvey 1968:69).

During World War II, the city's automobile plants switched to the manufacture of military products, including artillery, jeeps and ships. The war created thousands of new jobs and resulted in another mass migration of black Americans to Detroit. This influx was intensified when President Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 8802 banning discrimination in employment in government and defense industries on the basis of race, creed, or color. Garreau describes this migration as the largest internal shift in American history, with the exception of the pioneers heading west. *"In the 1950s alone, one of six Southern blacks left for the greater opportunities of the Industrialised North and West."* (Garreau 1991 : 154). The pressure on already crowded cities intensified racial tensions. Inner city schools became overcrowded and crime escalated. In 1943, competition between Detroit's blacks and whites for housing led to a race riot. The immediate cause of the riot was the exclusion of black Americans from a new housing development near a Polish working class district. *Thirty-eight deaths were attributed to the riot, and 1000 were left homeless, greatly adding to the housing as well as to the welfare problems of that troubled city."* (McKelvey 1968.124).

The riots of 1943 stimulated a trend towards suburban living. From the early 1950s thousands of white middle-class families moved from Detroit to new suburban developments outside the city. This decentralization of people was not confined to Detroit alone but was a general American urban phenomenon leading to massive loss of prime farm land and impoverished city-cores. Unlike their European counterparts, Americans had never been completely happy with the notion of high density urban living. Frank Lloyd Wright, (1867-1959), one of America's most influential architects was anti-city and anti the money-centred urban society America was fast becoming. He saw the wide open spaces of rural America as embodying the pioneering spirit of the American people. In the 1930s he developed his ideas for an ideal community called Broadacre City, a concept founded in the English Garden City idea, which embraced mystic notions of man's relationship with nature and the American belief in a plentiful supply of land. Broadacre City provided an acre of land for each family in a decentralized low density, spaced out development. Broadacre City was never built but the detached house with a picket fence became the American dream. *"After the Second World War, it became government policy to make this dream come true. Ex-soldiers received financial help to buy new homes on green field sites physically and psychologically removed from the grime of cities."* (America's Cities Economist, Jan 10, 1998: 15). The population of Detroit fell from 1 849 568 in 1950 to 1 670 144 in 1960 and continued to drop during the 1960s. ( World Book, Vol 5, 1980 : 138). The city tried to reverse this trend by establishing many urban renewal projects during the 1950s and 1960s. Slums were cleared in seventeen areas, and the city erected nine large, low-rent housing developments and a medical centre but these improvements did little to avert the flow of people out of the inner city. (World Book Vol 5, 1980:138).

During the 1960s the black civil rights movement became the main domestic issue in America. Increasingly, blacks joined by whites, staged demonstrations to dramatize their demands for equal rights. Mass demonstrations throughout the nation culminated on August 28, 1963 in a

march led by Martin Luther King to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., where King delivered an oration on the theme of *"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will be judged not by the colour of their skin but by their character."* (Johnson 1997:744). This demonstration was part of the process which led to the passing of the Civil Rights Act by President Johnson in 1964. This Act restored the Federal Government's power to bar racial discrimination for the first time since the nineteenth century. This was followed by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Before this act, in the state of Mississippi, which had a higher proportion of blacks than any other state, only 6 % were registered to vote because of complicated tests. The new act had the right to vote enforced by Federal examiners and within thirty days of its enactment, black registration in Mississippi rose 120 %. But the irony was that attempts by successive presidents to obtain justice for American blacks resulted in escalating violence on the part of blacks. *"Here again, good intentions produced death and destruction. The problem was seen as threefold. First to end segregation especially in education. Second to enable blacks to exercise voting rights. Third to bring black incomes into line with white ones. It was believed that if the first two were solved the third would ultimately solve itself."* (Johnson 1983 : 645). But voting rights could not equalize black and white incomes nor could the huge sums of Federal money that Johnson poured into welfare. The danger of the kind of welfare state Johnson was creating was that it tended to push people out of the productive economy and made them dependents of the state. *"The more progress made, the more cash available, the more black anger increased."* (Johnson 1983 : 645).

The first black riots of the 1960s started in Birmingham, Alabama in 1962. Thereafter the riots spread to other American cities and especially to the big industrial cities of the north. In July 1967, rioting broke out in a chiefly black section of Detroit. The riot lasted a week, resulted in forty three deaths and property damage of $45 million. President Johnson was eventually forced to move in the 18th Airborne corps of paratroopers to restore order. *"It was the worst urban riot in American history, with more than forty people killed and much of the inner city, the shops and stores I knew, burned to the ground. Something changed after the riot. The city, the neighborhood, turned blacker. The white people started moving out to suburbs that sounded really far away."* (Richburg 1997:12). The exodus of whites out of Detroit's inner city to the suburbs escalated after the 1967 riot enabling the election of the city's first black mayor, Coleman Young in 1973. The city's economy suffered in 1974 and 1975 because of a nationwide recession and a sharp drop in automobile production. Detroit managed to recover during the late 1970s, when automobile production increased rapidly, but the city's population continued to decline. (World Book, Vol 5, 1980:138).

The American government tried to create some form of racial harmony and better racial relations during the 1960s by a court-mandated desegregation of the schools. This law encouraged further migration of whites into Detroit's neighbouring suburbs. Jobs, businesses and services narrowed as well as narrowing the inner city's tax base, which caused the inner city taxes to rise, pushing still more employers out as well as the black middle class to the suburbs. This movement of the city's population away from the inner city meant that the remaining people tended to be mostly unemployed poor black residents, prone to the rising crime and a rapidly deteriorating inner city school system.

The statistics speak for themselves. In 1996 Detroit issued only 86 new residential building permits, compared with a towering 7,197 in Oakland (a suburb adjacent to Detroit). Detroit's unemployment rate is over 8% compared with under 3% in bustling Oakland. And Detroit's Median household income is just over $21,000, compared with more than $47,000 in Oakland.

Local taxes in Detroit are more than six times higher than the Michigan average. (America's Cities, Economist, Jan 10, 1998: 15).

## 2.2 Causes of decentralisation in Detroit:

### 2.2.1 Transportation and Technology:

Before 1915 Americans traveled either by horse, water-transport or by rail. The invention of the steam engine by George Stephenson (1781-1848) was the first revolution in transportation, creating a mass transportation system. Before the combustion engine was manufactured in any great quantity people had a choice of either walking or catching the nearest train to work. This phenomenon created the old "downtowns" in American cities like Detroit. People were forced to live on "top of each other" in order to be as close as possible to their workplace. In city centres, rising land values pushed office buildings higher and higher. The archetypal New York city skyscraper appeared early in the 1920s and cities all over America became a forest of tall buildings. The resultant pollution and overcrowding created unhealthy living environments.

Edison, who invented the incandescent lamp, predicted as early as 1895 the automobile revolution and said that the auto was *"the coming wonder ... it is only a matter of time before the cars and trucks of every major city will be run by motors."* (Johnson 1997:504). The understanding of *"economies of scale"* by Henry Ford and the mass manufacturing of the automobile meant that most middle class American families could afford a car by the end of the 1920s. This changed America's cities transit system dramatically. The automobile gave people an individual freedom of movement they had never before experienced. *"The most important aspect of the automobile is that it shifted the balance of power from centralised modes of organisation towards the individual."* (Garreau 1991:107). The car allowed people to move out of the crowded and congested old downtowns into the more leafy and pleasant surrounding areas. As Blake McKelvey succinctly summed it up, *"The skyscraper rivaled the automobile as the symbol of success in the twenties. One was the sign of a prosperous community, the other of an affluent family. Few even among the planners realised how opposed these two symbols were and how sharp their rivalry would become."* (McKelvey 1968:48).

Detroit was at the centre stage of a new epoch in world history. The automobile radically changed urban design, and Detroit was one of the first cities to experience what was later called decentralization. In 1919, General Motors started building its new headquarters, not in the old downtown, but in a place called New Centre. *"It was near the intersection of the first beltway, Grand Boulevard, and the premier radial road, Woodward Avenue. It was accessible to downtown by car but it was also close to GM's factories some of which were purposely located outside the city and its taxing power. It was very close to swanky neighborhoods like Boston Edison area where the executives lived, and it offered far more land than the old downtown both for expansion and parking. Right there in New Centre, immediately after World War I, Edge City was probably born."*( Garreau 1991: 110). Henry Ford was quick to see the coming trend and built his new factory in an area called Dearborn which was his old home town and the location of his Fairlane Estate just outside Detroit. As early as 1929 Detroit changed its urban transportation philosophy from mass transit by rail to individual transportation, by *"rejecting a proposed subway in 1929; as the automobile capital turned, to planning for the development of a superhighway system and a widespread suburban pattern."* (McKelvey 1968:46).

If the car and the freeway gave people individual freedom of movement, the telephone provided instant communication from any point. More recent developments in communication such as personal computers, internet and fax machines have meant that millions of workers no longer need to gather every day at one location with other members of their organizations to work efficiently. This has enabled a growing number of large organizations to move routine operations to lower cost quarters in the suburbs. *" The suburbanization of jobs decreases the dependence of many suburbs residents on the central cities, since they now both live and work outside those cities."* (Downs 1994 :46).

### 2.2.2 The Emancipation of Women:

After World War II women increasingly challenged society's traditional image of what their role should be. Educational and employment reforms slowly increased the rights of America and European women. By the 1950s suburbanization had dramatically expanded, but it was still not common for families to own more than one car. The typical female was still home based. But by the 1970s this had changed; more women went to college and held a wider variety of jobs than ever before. *"1978 was the peak year in all of American history for women entering the work force. In the second half of the 1970s, unprecedently more than eight million hitherto non-wage earning women went out and found jobs."* (Garreau 1991: 111). From 1970 to 1987 the number of cars on the road in America more than doubled. This was a direct result of more women owning cars. (Garreau 1991:113). Simultaneously a multitude of developers started to put up office buildings and shopping malls out beyond the old downtowns. It was more convenient for women to work and shop close to their homes.

### 2.2.3 Building obsolescence / Abandonment:

A major problem concerning the inner city is the structural and functional obsolescence of the buildings themselves. Structural obsolescence refers to the general deterioration of the structural elements within a building especially with regard to its services. These services include lifts, water reticulation, air conditioning systems and sewerage systems. Functional obsolescence refers to a building's state when it no longer accommodates the needs of a modern tenant. It is the product of technological innovations and changes in consumer preferences. It is most evident in industrial structures where technological innovations take place at a rapid rate, for instance, modern computer technology requires that office buildings have special ducts for computer cables. Changes in fashions also resulted in middle income families moving from multi-storied blocks of flats to single storied detached homes in suburbia.

Outward signs of some of these obsolescence problems are vacant dwelling units and commercial buildings. Structural elements are extremely expensive to repair and landlords, especially, where there is little chance of returns, are reluctant to spend money. Detroit's fifty years of depopulation plus dramatic property devaluation resulted in residential and

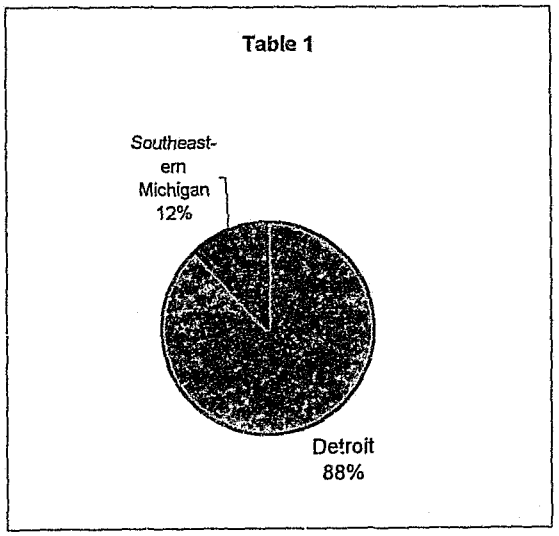
## Teardowns outpace new construction

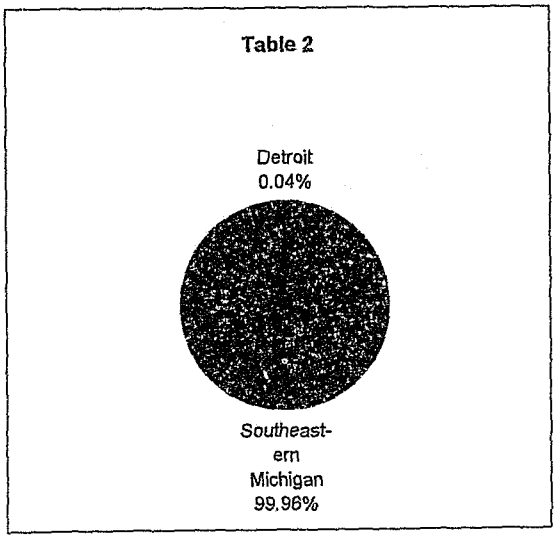
**Table 1: Old housing demolitions:**

Detroit's 8,432 housing demolitions last year (1996) comprised 88 percent of the 9,556 total in southeastern Michigan.

**Table 2: New Housing Permits:**

Detroits 86 resdential permits last year (1996) accounted for a fraction of the 23,338 issued in the seven counties of southeastern Michigan.




Source: Pepper,Detroit news, May 4, 1997: 10 of 39

commercial property being abandoned. Homes were impossible to sell so they were simply abandoned, leaving them to strippers, vagrants and ultimately the bulldozers. According to Jon Pepper of the Detroit News, in a typical year more than 10000 people walked away from their homes. *" The middle-class abandonment of the city from a population high of 2:1 million people in 1948 to an estimated 850 000 people today has left devastation on a scale that is unimaginable to those who don't see it first hand."* (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4, 1997).

The main problem is that it is difficult for the city to establish records of ownership. Few companies will insure property titles that revert to the State of Michigan as a result of non payment of taxes. The state takes land by mailing notices rather than suing individually. This leaves legal uncertainty over the title. According to the deputy treasurer Mark Hilpert, *"Title companies are very 'leery' of insuring title unless there has been formal court action after the tax sale."* (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4 1997).

Adding to the problem according to Pepper is that Mayor Archer inherited a planning and development department that was incapable of processing even the simplest transaction on a timely basis. *"The result is that despite encouraging progress Detroit's brownfields remain at a competitive disadvantage against suburban greenfields in the race for new jobs that sustain neighbourhoods, stores and government services."* (Pepper, Detroit News, Aug 25 199).

This means the costs and complexities of gathering properties for resale and redevelopment slows down Detroit's efforts to attract business back to the city. There may need to be some state law reforms to return abandoned land to the city in a more timely manner. The assembly of land and environmental cleanup may also require a special programme using public money.

### 2.2.4 Crime:

Detroit is perceived by many Americans living in the suburbs to be a dangerous place that is best avoided. After World War II America entered the greatest period of economic growth in its history. This prosperity resulted in vast numbers of people moving from the cities to the suburbs which offered new housing, lower density living and usually better schools. But not all Americans shared in this prosperity. The exodus of the middle class and wealthier Americans resulted in low income, mainly black households remaining behind in the inner cities: Neighbourhoods in which poor people are concentrated are more seriously plagued by crime. *"Associated with structural and pattern deficiencies in blighted areas is a high incidence of socio-economic problems. The poverty, crime, unemployment, transiency, and poor health conditions persisting in these areas adversely affect patterns of living and the operation of commercial and industrial establishments."*(Renewal and Revenue report 1962: 2) Deprived areas also have the highest rate of broken homes. For many young people, the excitement of the streets provides the only escape from boredom and seemingly unsolvable problems. Thus the streets are the scene of much vice and crime. Compounding the problem, illegal drugs remain abundant and easily available. Crime rates have dramatically increased because of the needs of drug addicts and conflicts among dealers. This has resulted in many inner city residents being afraid to venture onto their streets and pavements.*"In many cities, gunshot wounds are the leading cause of death among black males age 14 to 24."* (Downs 1994: 79).

*"The US murder rate was 9.4 per 100 000 people in 1990, double that of France, three times that of the United Kingdom, and nine times that of Japan."* (Downs 1994: 79).

Mayors of American cities are in charge of the local police and can control to a degree the way the city is policed. The mayor of New York, Mr Guiliani has succeeded in dramatically reducing the crime rate in the city by implementing a policy of *"zero tolerance"* which means even minor or petty crimes are prosecuted. Unfortunately Detroit still suffers appalling crime, social disparities and remarkable underachievement in education when compared to cities in Japan and Europe. (America's Cities, Economist, Jan 10, 1998: 15).

## 2.2.5 Education:

The poor quality of public schooling in inner cities aggravates all other problems. In particular it handicaps young people trying to get jobs and drives them into criminal activities. In 1955 the Supreme Court called for the desegregation of all public schools. Efforts to eliminate segregation however, benefited mainly middle class blacks. Sadly, although laws supporting de jure segregation were declared unconstitutional, de facto racial segregation increased. A larger percentage of black children attended predominately black public schools in the late 1960s than at the time of the Supreme Court's desegregation ruling. The inadequacies of American public schools are magnified in many city schools by the large number of children from very poor homes. Poverty among children is more concentrated in central cities than elsewhere. *" Of all persons younger than 18 years of age living in central cities in 1990 30.5 % were in households below the poverty level."* (Downs 1994 :48). This combination of de facto segregation and concentrated poverty is typical of public schools in inner cities. Downs points out that this fatal cocktail produces abysmal results in many of the nations inner city schools.

In the early 1970s federal courts ordered that schools in several cities became more racially balanced by the busing of pupils from one neighborhood to another. However, busing projects brought bitter opposition from parents. In 1974, the Supreme court rejected a Detroit plan to bus pupils across school district lines and busing projects in various states were largely discontinued.

Various ideas for improving the education of inner city children have been put forward over the years. One idea is state sponsorship of private religious inner city schools which have a better record of good discipline. This is done with a voucher system which enables parents to choose whatever school they want for their children. However voucher schemes (especially when they extend to religious schools) have often run into constitutional challenges. (America's Cities, Economist, Jan 10, 1998:18).

Another idea gaining popularity is the charter school system. Charter schools encourage increased parent involvement and are directly responsible for improved achievement. They may not charge additional tuition fees and are non-sectarian and so avoid the separation of church/state debate. The charter school movement is producing encouraging results and is supported by President Clinton. *"President Bill Clinton and his education secretary strongly support the charter idea of having new kinds of public schools and convinced Congress this year to allocate $51 million to help start charter schools."* (Nathan, Detroit News, Nov 17,

1996). But major educational groups are often strongly opposed to charter legislation which allows more than one group to sponsor public schools and gives charter schools a right to by-pass many rules and regulations. In Detroit the body responsible for education is the Michigan Education Association and it is strongly opposed to the charter idea and lists charter schools legislation as one of several *"far right"* activities in Michigan. However, the Michigan Educational Association is strongly attached to the unions which feel threatened by the new system. The unions have even warned that they will reject student teachers coming from universities which sponsor charter schools. (Nathan, Detroit News, Nov 17, 1996).

One of the principal challenges is the improvement of the social disposition of Detroit's predominately black inner city youth. Some of the worst aspects of life in inner cities stem from destructive behaviour patterns which include hostility among teenagers towards those who do well at school. Part of the problem is increased pressure from a commercialized culture. *"American commercialized culture has had a terrible effect on inner city minority group behaviour. Quick resort to violence, early engagement in sexual activity, fascination with expensive consumer goods, and indifference to human rights and life represent extreme versions of values constantly propagated by white dominated media and business firms. The most violent and inhuman behavior reflects the actions of movie and television macho killer-heroes who gun down opponents by the score without a qualm and without legal retribution to the applause of the good guys in these stylised epics. Recently, popular black rap musicians have also been glorifying violent, antipolice, antifemale behavior for young black men. Inner city teenagers are constantly seduced by these images because they are often without the benefit of strong families, positive male role models, religious values, and other mediating institutions."* ( Downs 1994:105).

But Downs points out that change to attitudes will not be easy. The predominance of hedonist behaviour, amongst those living in poverty results in a nihilist threat, that is the loss of hope and absence of meaning.

### 2.2.6 Retail:

The continuing decline of households required to supports stores makes a retail comeback in Detroit difficult. Like many big cities, Detroit has seen vast shopping malls mushrooming up all over suburbia. According to a study by American Business Journals Inc. Detroit's share of retailed spending is the lowest amongst the 80 largest metro areas in America. Houston takes $ 584 for every $ 1000 spent in its region. Detroit gets just $ 75 (Pepper, Detroit news, May 4, 1997).

**Detroit retail share worst in nation:**

The share of retail spending in Metro Detroit held by the city's stores is tied with Hartford, Conn, as the lowest among the nation's 80 largest metro areas. Detroit also suffered the greatest decline during the last period measured by the U.S. Census.

| Ranking | Shares of each $1,000 spent in metro area | Percent change (1982-92) |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| 5. San Antonio | $785 | -4.3% |
| 13. Indianapolis | 645 | -0.5 |
| 17. Houston | 584 | -7.7 |
| 26. San Diego | 446 | -2.7 |
| 44. New York | 260 | -23.5 |
| 49. Chicago | 222 | -21.3 |
| 52. Los Angeles | 211 | -14.3 |
| 61. Philadelphia | 161 | -20.4 |
| 75. Washington | 100 | -35.7 |
| 79. Hartford | 74 | -46.0 |
| 79. Detroit | 74 | -47.1 |

Source: Pepper, Detroit News, May 4,1997

## 2.2.7 Politics:

*"The present and future problems of our cities are as complex as they are manifold. There must be expansion: but orderly and planned expansion, not explosion and sprawl. Basic public facilities must be extended ever further into the areas surrounding urban centres .... The scourge of blight must be overcome, and the central cores of our cities, with all their great richness of economic and cultural wealth, must be restored to lasting vitality....We neglect our cities at our peril, for neglecting them we neglect the nation."* (President John Kennedy)[1]

The founders of major American cities drew their original boundaries to encompass what they thought would be enough land for expansion. But the unlimited low density urban sprawl which began in the 1950s resulted in growth well beyond these initial boundaries. In some cases, when it had the legal power to do so, the city responded by annexing the new suburbs. But in most American metropolitan areas, including Detroit, residents outside the original city's boundaries established separate local governments legally independent of the city. These local governments control land use, public schools and land tax in their areas. Most metropolitan areas have no centralized metropolitan government to handle problems that affect the entire area. David Rusk makes a distinction between what he calls elastic cities such as

[1] Maxwell Meyerson, *Memorable Quotations of John F.Kennedy* (New York, 1965), pp. 250-251.

Houston which grew through aggressive annexation of surrounding areas and consolidated with suburban governments creating one unified government and inelastic cities such as Detroit which has a central city frozen within its city limits and is surrounded by growing suburbs. Unable to tap the areas of greater economic growth (its suburbs) the inelastic city becomes increasingly poor and reliant on federal aid. (Rusk 1993:16).

**Tax.** This fragmentation of local government affects the financial position of both city and suburbs and leads to a conflict of interests. Industries may contribute to the development of the suburbs in which they are located but they do not contribute to the maintenance of the city. For example a large industry may be located in a suburb and be taxed by the local government but its workers may live in the city that does not receive any revenue from that industry. As a result slums and blighted areas appear quickly in cities that suddenly lack tax resources and the means of financing their services. Ironically as the tax base narrowed, taxes in the city rose, pushing still more employers as well as the black middle class out. High taxes in Detroit not only keep businesses out but also residents. According to Pepper, *"Every $ 1000 in the state equalized value of a Detroit house means $ 58 in taxes, nearly twice the statewide average. Coupled with a three percent tax on income for people who live and work in Detroit, the taxes rob citizens of wealth that could be used to fix up homes, send children to college, buy a second home or retire."* (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4, 1997). The punitive tax burden on residents and businesses alike puts Detroit in a difficult position when it comes to competing for residents and the investments necessary to create jobs and facilitate urban renewal. The suburbanites feel strongly that they should not contribute to the inner city's revenue. Downs warns, *"But the long-run welfare of the suburban residents is still closely linked to how well central cities and their residents perform significant social and economic functions in each metropolitan area. The belief among suburbanites that they are independent of central cities is a delusion. So is the belief that central cities are obsolete. Both fallacies have consequences dangerous to America's economic and social heath."* (Downs 1994:52). The suburbanites generally resist any attempt to merge local governments into a larger metropolitan area. But in the end some degree of regional planning that considers the needs of both city and suburbs will be essential.

In the late 1960s black civil rights groups grew increasingly militant, Black Power urged black Americans to build power bases by solidifying black communities into political blocks. Supporters of Black Power insisted that integration had only benefited middle class blacks and had not helped the poor, disadvantaged minorities. The exodus of whites from the 1950s onwards resulted in the nation's inner cities becoming increasingly populated by blacks, allowing blacks such as Coleman Young for the first time to become mayors of some major American cities. Unlike South African mayors who have only ceremonial roles the mayors of American cities have executive powers and can take and implement decisions about how their cites are run. Young served an unprecedented five terms as mayor from 1974 to 1994. (Willing, Detroit News, Aug 26 1997)[1]. According to Coleman Young he himself suffered blatant discrimination all his life and early career. *"Despite a fine record as a student,"* he often would tell interviewers, *"he was denied admission to Catholic high schools and was later blocked from taking a college scholarship solely because he was black."* (Willing, Detroit News, Aug 26, 1997).[1]

During his twenty years as mayor, Young implemented a policy of aggressive affirmative action. *"He was proudest of his use of affirmative action to change the colour of the police*

[1] An obituary written by Richard Willing and Vivian Toy in the Detroit News *Coleman Young dead at 79*

*department and municipal services from white to black."* (Willing, Detroit News, Aug 26, 1997). He ushered in rules and regulations that attempted to redistribute wealth to blacks through dramatically higher taxes, hiring quotas and ordinances directing businesses to minorities. *"Young's Executive Order 22 in 1983 demanded that any construction project in the city funded by public money must be performed by 50 percent Detroit residents, 25 percent minorities and 5 percent women."*(Pepper, Detroit News, May 4, 1997). A later Young ordinance gave preference to minority-owned businesses for city contracts. Detroit under Young also pursued an expensive social welfare agenda that diverted money from businesses and residents to city government. The end result was that business followed paths of lower taxes and fewer regulations and moved out of the city to the suburbs. The cumbersome rules designed to help minorities actually cost them their jobs by discouraging private investment in the city.

**Bureaucracy**. A further problem working against urban renewal in Detroit is a monstrous and costly city bureaucracy built up by Young. The flight of businesses meant the city became the dominant employer. Virtually all the 17 000 city employees other than appointees are covered by civil service laws as well as labour unions." *About 90 percent are represented by 48 labour unions each with its own set of rules."* (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4, 1997).

Coleman Young had originally built up his career through the trade union movement. On becoming mayor, the labour unions become the most powerful political force in the city. According to Willing, after a brief stint in the military during World War II, Young returned to Detroit and took an organizing post with the United Public Workers, a small union based in New York and run by a communist, Ewart Guinier. The labour movement, Young said later, introduced him to a *"whole new philosophy – I began to identify with working people and social and economic justice."* (Willing, Detroit News Aug 26, 1997).

According to Pepper, city department heads became constrained in whom they could hire and how workers were deployed and whether a poorly-performing employee could be fired. Civil service rules were originally written to protect employees from getting fired for political reasons every time there was a change in city government. Unfortunately, the rules ultimately restricted flexibility and led to inefficiency. (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4 1997). For developers with multiple options to make money in other places, the frustration of getting permits and working with cumbersome bureaucracy meant that they simply moved on to other areas. *"I really assumed I would have my certificate of occupancy by now, "said Lorry John, who recently renovated the historic Hamwell apartment building in Woodbridge. "But you can't get it unless the electrical department sign off, and they're forcing the guy who installed our fire system to go back to electrical and pull a permit there. The fire Marshal had already passed it, but electrical said that's not enough."* (Pepper, Detroit News, Sept 10, 1997). Failure to get a permit in a timely way means useless expense for builders and developers.

Powerful labour unions also resulted in lack of flexibility. The council sided with union employees protesting the transfer of management of the Detroit Institute of Arts (one of the cities main cultural jewels) to its financial backers, after a museum janitor said, *"he'd rather see the museum close than change the way it does business."* (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4, 1997).

**Privatization.** In big cities all over America, with the exception of Detroit, mayors have introduced employee accountability by requiring workers to compete for jobs with private firms. Competitive contracting has brought better services at lower costs to residents and

businesses. Civil servants can also take pride in their work because they know that if they get the job they are more competitive than private companies. But in Detroit political leaders including the new mayor, Dennis Archer, have steadfastly resisted competitive contracting. *"It is a reflection of a political climate dominated by public employees, withering business influence and city contracts that concede decision making to labour unions that no candidate for public office will even discuss the possibility of private contracting."* (Pepper, Detroit News, Jul 27 1997). One of the anti-privatization results is that bulk refuse routinely picked up in the suburbs by private contractors remain on street curbs throughout Detroit for weeks and months at a time.

## 2.3 Attempts at urban renewal:

### 2.3.1 The redevelopment of blighted residential areas:

As far back as 1936 the American government recognized the problem of degradation in inner cities and resolved to rebuild blighted areas with federal assistance if necessary. In 1949 congress passed the Housing Act which accepted the subsidy of low cost housing as a national responsibility and extended the use of federal funds to back slum clearance and urban redevelopment. (McKelvey 1968: 132). A National Conference on Post-War Housing, meeting in Chicago in 1944, had raised more issues than it solved. In the midst of heated discussion, a new issue arose. A black delegate posed the question by asking how the public and private developers would treat the black people they displaced in the slums. Hugh Pomeroy of the National Association of Housing Officials assured her that any government would guarante housing to all those displaced. (McKelvey 1968:129). But, the delegate had raised a very valid issue and one that was not always resolved fairly.

Business leaders of American cities such as Detroit were aware that inner city slums threatened the economic vitality of the central business district and devised and co-ordinated various schemes for urban redevelopment. Their backing for the Taft Ellender Wagner Act reflected their desire for federal aid to halt the spread of city slums. *" Their plans envisaged open plazas to encourage the construction of new commercial properties and high rise apartments, some in the luxury bracket to offset the emerging pattern of the poor inner city."* (McKelvey 1968: 134).

An example of these projects was *Lafayette Park*, conceived as early as 1946, in Detroit *"when civic leaders believed that clearing this slum would remove a blighted influence on the central business district and that replacing it with a residential superblock would attract families who would otherwise leave Detroit for the suburbs."* (Garvin 1995: 209). In order to develop this island of residential serenity in the middle of Detroit, 1953 families and 989 individuals, 98 percent of whom were black and more than three quarters of whom had incomes of less than $ 3 500 were cleared from the area. *Lafayette Park's* development only became feasible after Congress enacted the Housing Act of 1949, which enabled $ 4.3 million in federal subsidies to be supplied for the project This input was still not enough and it was only in 1954 when congress amended the Housing Act that development on *Lafayette Park* could begin. Tall apartment blocks with broad expanses of landscaped gardens in between were built on the cleared area. When completed, the complex was occupied by mainly middle income renters and included a broad spectrum of racial and ethnic backgrounds. (Garvin 1995: 210).

The project was hailed as a success by Garvin, *"Lafayette Park is a unique island of stability"* and again, *"Although Detroit has continued to deteriorate and lose population, Lafayette Park has remained occupied and well maintained."* (Garvin 1995: 210). But if this experiment is analysed more laterally it will be seen as a meretricious development. The poor people who originally resided in the area were merely moved to another area and benefited very little from the government subsidy. Blake McKelvey sums it up as follows: *"Many of its staunchest friends realized that the urban renewal projects had serious limitations and were producing some unfortunate results. The dislocation of old neighborhoods could in part be compensated for by developing carefully planned new communities. But the numbers of well-designed*

*projects either public or private was limited and the debate continued over the respective merits of high and low-rise apartments. Even when a satisfactory balance was achieved between density, living space and rental values, with perhaps a measure of architectural distinction, few if any of the former residents were able to enjoy it. And if some had found more suitable accommodation than before, many had been pushed into other wretched quarters which their numbers helped to depress."* (McKelvey 1968: 173). The developers and advocates of urban renewal projects had seriously misjudged the situation, the city's most serious problem was not its slums but the plight of its poor inner city residents.

### 2.3.2 The renewal of the central business district or CBD:

The renewal of the central business district or CBD must be viewed from a different perspective to the residential areas. In Detroit many projects were undertaken to recreate a better corporate image for the city. An interesting project was the *Renaissance Centre* which was developed with the best of intentions but ultimately did not benefit the inner city itself. Detroit has always had one great advantage, its treasury of architecture, history and cultural diversity distinguishes it from any other city in Michigan. *"The strategy was to allow Detroit's business district to profit from a lucrative tourist and convention business."* (Garvin 1995:92). The *Renaissance Centre's* backers selected a site along the Detroit river front near the Cobo Exhibition Hall and Convention Area. The project cleared 33 acres of blighted property. The Renaissance Centre opened in 1977, a $ 350 million complex, including the worlds tallest, 73-storey hotel, four 39-storey office towers and a 14 acre, 4 storey podium containing additional retail, convention and parking space. Millions of tourists made use of the facilities and business men profited from the revenue they generated. But according to Garvin the only loser was downtown Detroit. *"The project's office space was designed to attract the city's major firms. Consequently, their move from existing downtown buildings drew customers away from the already declining business district. Still worse, the project was separated from downtown Detroit by the traffic on Jefferson Avenue. Convention visitors had no reason to leave the Renaissance Center."* (Garvin 1995: 92).

In 1994 Dennis Archer was elected the new mayor of Detroit. Like Coleman Young, he is a black American but is less confrontational. Realizing that the inner city could not be turned around without more private resources, he formed a new alliance between business and city. Together with a coalition of business, philanthropic and civic leaders he formed the Greater Downtown Partnership Inc. (Pepper, Detroit News Mar 10, 1996). Archer was determined to return Detroit to the status of, to use his favourite phrase, *"a world class city."* (Cantor, Detroit News, Jun 29, 1997). His administration maintained *"that streamlining government and creating a more inviting environment for business investment and the jobs it creates, helps city residents."* (Cantor, Detroit News June 29 1997). Through personal persuasion he helped win investments for the city such as the Chrysler Engine Plant, the planned Detroit Lions Indoor Stadium and numerous other projects. (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4, 1997). However the political dangers for Archer in Detroit are enormous. If he is perceived as a captive of either corporate interests or racial militants his power will diminish along with his chances of success. His reforms have not always been popular with all the residents of Detroit, Ed Vaugh a candidate in the 1997 mayoral elections maintained, *" Archer is giving the city away. Privatizing left and right. Doing away with jobs. Depopulating the city. If he's there another*

*eight years, there won't be any city of Detroit left. It will be owned lock stock and barrel by private corporations."* (Cantor, Detroit News, June 29, 1997).

Jon Pepper began writing in the Detroit News about the challenges to Detroit's renewed hope for urban renewal in his May 4, 1997 special report, *"Road to Renaissance"*. In the series he cautions against too optimistic a view of Detroit's so-called renaissance. He examines such obstacles to redevelopment as the problems with land assembly, the entrenched city bureaucracy, racial politics and the higher cost of doing business in Detroit. He praises Archer for introducing the language of modern government by stressing accountability and customer service. He sees it as a significant achievement that Archer has *"lowered the volume on the region's notorious racial rhetoric"* but he stresses that despite substantial progress, Detroit still remains well below the *"world-class city"* status that Archer envisioned upon taking office. (Pepper, Detroit News. Nov 9, 1997).

## What it takes to be world class

Mayor Dennis Archer is seeking to lead Detroit to become a "World-class city" by the year 2000. He has a long way to go in a short period of time. While any such designation is subjective, the American cities that typically rank with Paris, London, Rome, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Sydney as popular destinations are New York, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco and Washington. All of those cities built World-class amenities upon foundations of business, government, culture and intellectual life.

| A world class foundation | Detroit | New York | Chicago | Boston | San Francisco | Washington |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| Population | 997,297 | 7,319,546 | 2,749,881 | 550,715 | 738,371 | 554,000 |
| Fortune 500 companies | 3 | 47 | 17 | 6 | 10 | 5 |
| Colleges/Universities | 4 | 31 | 27 | 15 | 11 | 14 |
| Foreign consultants | 5 | 96 | 41 | 18 | 43 | 56 |
| Museums | 6 | 20 | 10 | 6 | 12 | 21 |
| World class Hotels | None | 12 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 6 |
| World class Restaurants | 4 | 44 | 15 | 12 | 16 | 12 |
| World class shopping | None | Fifth Ave | Michigan Ave | Newbury St | Union Sq | Goergetown |
| Homicide Rates* | 429 | 13.4 | 28.7 | 10.7 | 11.2 | 71.7 |
| Motor vehicle theft rates* | 3,435 | 824 | 1,240 | 1,683 | 1,160 | 1,801 |
| Building Demolitions | 17,960 | 2640 | 11,290 | 5 | 435 | 395 |
| Poverty Rates | 32,496 | 19,396 | 21,686 | 18,786 | 12,796 | 16,996 |
| Percentage youths 16-19 are dropouts | 19 | 14 | 17 | 9 | 9 | 14 |

* Per 100 000 residents

Source: Pepper, Detroit News, Nov 2, 1997

The real value of property in Detroit still remains well below that of its immediate neighbours. For example the recent $ 75 million purchase of the *Renaissance Centre* by General Motors, seen by many as the single most important statement of confidence in Detroit's future meant

that it was only sold for 10 cents on the dollar. To rebuild the centre from scratch would cost $ 750 million. (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4 1997). Detroit's unemployment rate has fallen below 10 percent for the first time in memory and more jobs are promised by the construction of two new stadiums and three casinos. However, thousands of Detroit's residents dependant on government aid for decades are virtually unemployable because of problems with literacy and drugs. It will also be a problem for the stadium builders to meet the city's quotas for minorities in the skilled trades. Most skilled carpenters, plumbers or painters of any colour have steady work in the suburbs, that they will be reluctant to leave for short term jobs. (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4, 1997).

The most promising aspect of the renaissance in Detroit is the growth of small business. The Big Three car makers, who have established a goal of procuring five percent of their supplies from minority-owned firms by the year 2000, are helping to create a new class of black wealth in Metro Detroit. The annual listing by Black Enterprise magazine of America's most successful African-American entrepreneurs shows Metro Detroit has more success stories than any other region. Ron Hall, president of the Michigan Minority Business Development Council says that *"the number of firms working with minority business in Metro Detroit has more than doubled in recent years."* (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4, 1997). It must be pointed out, however, that this is Metro Detroit and not the inner city.

**2020 Vision**

The Southeast Michigan Council of Government projected every county in Metro Detroit to see steady growth in employment to the year 2020. It, however, projected Detroit to experience more job losses without significant redevelopment.

| Area | Jobs in 1990 | Jobs in 2020 | Percentage Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| Livingston County | 39,296 | 71,992 | **88.2** |
| Macomb County | 333,723 | 415.060 | **24.4** |
| Monroe County | 50,364 | 66,361 | **31.8** |
| Oakland County | 681,037 | 883,165 | **29.7** |
| St. Clair County | 55,730 | 71,450 | **28.2** |
| Wayne County | 565,703 | 666,659 | **18.3** |
| Detroit | 412,490 | 336,795 | **-18.4** |

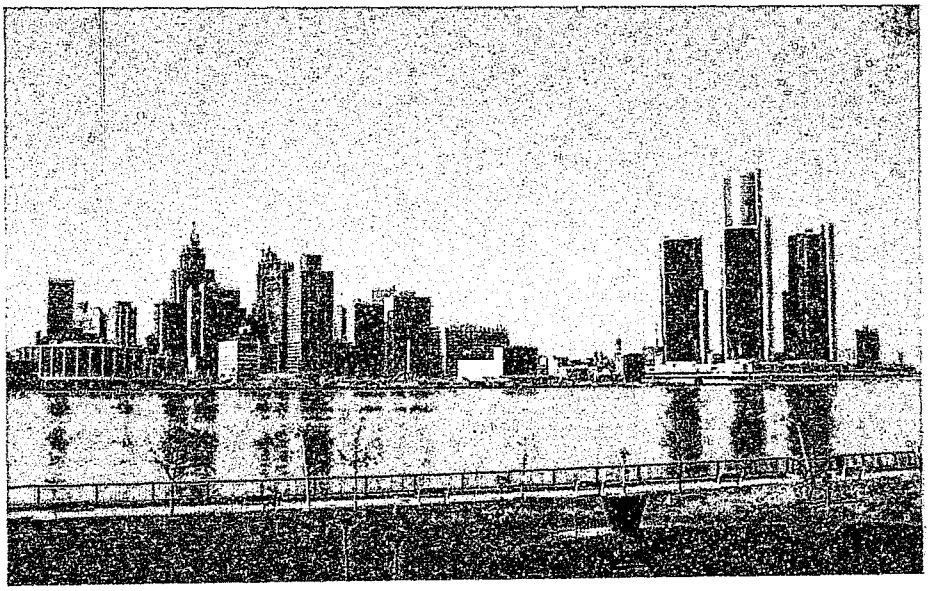
Source: Pepper, Detroit News, Aug, 1997

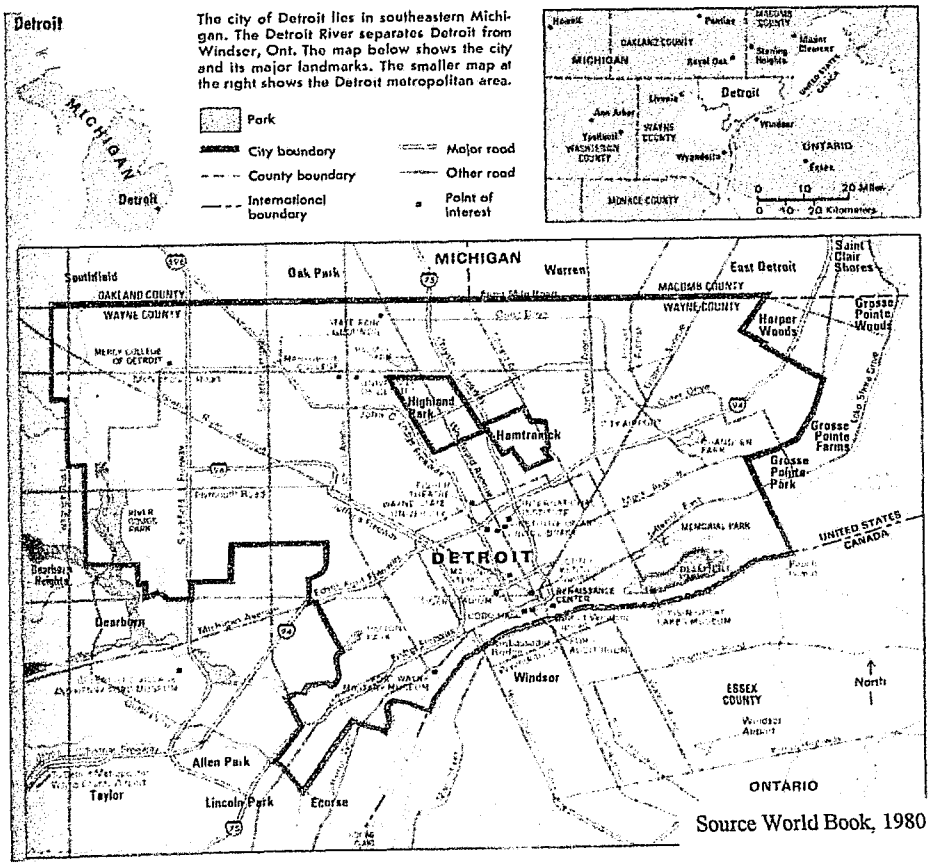
The only way to uplift slum areas or ghettos is by improving the economic position of the residents. In other words, by creating a healthier economic environment around the slums, better paid jobs are created, enabling the people in degraded areas to help themselves. A 1993 study by Stephen Moore and Dean Stansel claimed that urban decay is caused primarily by the city's fiscal policies and not by high rates of poverty or other urban social problems. *"Through an aggressive agenda of budget control, tax reduction, privatization and deregulation America's declining cities can rise again in prominence and prosperity."* (Moore 1993:2 quoted in Downs 1994). They claim that high taxes drive away business and households. The main solution lies in getting jobs back and the economy restarted. Recently in Detroit, the

Comercia Bank Economist, David Littman warned that if the city does not, *"deregulate, privatize and lower tax rates it will not reverse the downward momentum."* (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4, 1997). The city needs to signal that the days of ever escalating tax have ended. *"Archer's first tax cut was small but symbolically important."* (Pepper, Detroit News, May 4, 1997).

In Detroit some forms of revitalization of the inner city ended up being of dubious merit. Richard Tomlinson warns that, *"Follow-up research has shown that while downtown revitalisation has done much for the appearance of many* [American] *central cities, it has not reduced unemployment or improved household incomes when compared with cities which have not benefited from downtown revitalisation. It turns out that the best known US urban success stories are also the cities where income inequality is greatest. The US models for city centre revitalisation – sports stadiums, conference centres, etcetera – have not addressed poverty. We should be wary of copying them."* (Tomlinson, Business Day, Feb 25, 1998).

# Downtown Detroit on the left and on the right the Renaissance Centre.






Source World Book, 1980

# 3 Decentralization in Johannesburg:

## 3.1 Historical Background:

*"One thing showed with sufficient distinctness to attract and astonish all eyes. The whole crest of the Rand ridge was fringed with factory chimneys. We had marched nearly 500 miles through a country which, though full of promise seemed to European eyes desolate and wild, and now we turned a corner suddenly, and there before us sprang the evidence of wealth, manufacture and bustling civilization."*(Winston Churchill, 1900.)[1]

Johannesburg was founded in 1886 after prospectors found gold on the farm Langlaagte. This discovery resulted in the Rand becoming the world's richest goldfield. Chipkin points out that from the beginning Johannesburg's spiritual centre was not a church but the Stock Exchange building of 1889. Only a decade after its founding, *"Johannesburg was transformed into a vast sea of Victorian townships by the 'Great Kaffir' Boom of 1894 and 1895, when stocks in the Witwatersrand gold mines rocketed in price on the London stock market."* (Chipkin 1993: 25).

Geology and the presence of the world market created the late nineteenth century industrial town of Johannesburg. Pakenham describes early Johannesburg as an infant prodigy of a city. After only fifteen years, its population exceeded fifty thousand Europeans, giving it the greatest concentration of Europeans in the whole sub-continent. But Pakenham goes on to say that there was another Johannesburg, *"the African location where the 'mine boys' lived. The mines had an unquenchable appetite for cheap labour; eighty eight thousand Africans were employed on the Rand during the year 1898. This other Johannesburg was by all accounts, an appalling place full of typhoid and pneumonia."* (Pakenham 1979: 47). In close proximity to the black locations lived the Cape Coloured people who were carpenters, tram-car drivers and craftsmen. Finally, there were a couple of hundred Indians from Natal, who ran cheap shops and stalls in the market.

Melinda Silverman points out that from the beginning Johannesburg was formed by a pattern that manifested a high degree of fragmentation and dispersion. *"The historical origins of dispersion in the South African city are rooted firstly in Johannesburg's colonial origins and secondly in South Africa's unique form of racial capitalism, more commonly known as apartheid."* (Silverman 1996: 69).

By the end of the nineteenth century the 'new rich' had begun to separate themselves from the vicinity of the mining camps and move to the areas on the north face of the Witwatersrand ridge. It was in Parktown, facing north, away from the whole ugly structure of nineteenth century industrialization, that this new-rich class founded a segregated residential reserve, *"establishing a fenced compound of their own, the counterpart of those overcrowded compounds on mining property where migrant labourers from half of Southern Africa were kraaled like cattle on Highveld farms."* (Chipkin 1993: 30).

---

[1] Churchill, W.S. Frontiers and Wars, 1972:570 quoted in Chipkin: 1993: 11

The goldfields were viewed by South Africa's black rural population as a place to find employment and thereby a way out of poverty. But Chipkin argues that this tide of black urban immigration can not be divorced from a vast scale of dispossession. In 1913 the first Union Parliament passed the Natives Land Act which divided the land into black and white compartments: 13 per cent of the land area for blacks, 87 per cent for white ownership, if we take into account the subsequent amendments in the 1936 legislation. Johannesburg or 'Egoli' was the main destination for the landless poor. Some found house jobs in the suburbs while others found jobs as migrant workers on the mines. An 1899 plan of Johannesburg indicates 'Kaffir and Coolie' locations wedged between the poor-white Boer slum area of Brickfields and the goods yards at Braamfontein station. An outbreak of bubonic plague in 1904 gave the municipal government the excuse to destroy these locations. The people were then moved by special train to Klipspruit farm. It was in this camp at Klipspruit about 13 miles south west of Johannesburg that *"the remote segregated dormitory area later called Soweto"* arose. (Chipkin 1993: 198). This may be viewed as the first of a series of so-called 'urban renewal' schemes which legally removed black people from the city and settled them on the periphery.

In 1922 the Stallard Commission on local government issued its commendation: total segregation and no security of tenure for blacks. *"The Native"*, the report said, *"should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, only insofar as he is required to minister to the needs of the white man and should depart therefrom when he ceases to so minister."* (quoted in Chipkin 1993: 200). Thus when the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948, a firm basis for racial segregation was already in place.

World War II fueled an increase in manufacturing in goods and arms and resulted in a further influx into South African industrial towns. The African population of Johannesburg doubled from a quarter of a million in 1936 to above half a million in 1948. (Chipkin 1993 : 20). Nelson Mandela describes in his autobiography how he watched the black population of Johannesburg double during the war years. *"The country was supplying men and goods to the war effort. Demand for labour was high, and Johannesburg became a magnet for Africans from the countryside seeking work. Between 1941, when I arrrived, and 1946, the number of Africans in the township would double. Every morning, the township felt larger than it had the day before. Men found jobs in factories and housing in the non-Europen townships of Newclare, Martindale, George Goch, Alexandria, Sopiatown and the Western Native Township,*[1] *a prison like compound of a few thousand match-box houses on treeless ground."* (Mandela 1994: 78). Sophiatown, Newclare and Alexandria were exceptional in that they were areas where black owners could obtain freehold property, a right the Nationalist Government would later take away. This enormous influx of black people into Johannesburg resulted in serious social problems. The congestion of people meant that houses and yards in townships were overflowing and squatter camps were set up on any available space. Clearly the post-war government of Smuts was sitting on a urban powder keg. The 'post war reforms' promised by spokesmen such as the Union High Commissioner in London, Deneys Reitz, never materialized. (Chipkin 1993: 207).

In 1948 the Nationalist Government of Dr.Malan was voted into power by the white electorate and began implementing its infamous policy of apartheid. Silverman points out that the Nationalists, having promised in the election to resolve the 'native problem', set about refining segregated patterns in the city. Their efforts included more forced removals from the white

[1] later known as Soweto

city, including the fiercely contested removal from Sophiatown. The Nationalists introduced a number of new legislative measures including the Group Areas Acts of 1950 and 1966 which *"have had more far-reaching effects on racial segregation than any previous legislation, producing distinctive apartheid cities which represented a major re-ordering of the segregation which preceded them."* (Lemon 1991: 8 quoted in Silverman 1993: 72). In terms of the Group Areas Act (1966) land was set aside for the exclusive occupation by different race groups with the "non-white" groups being forcibly removed to the periphery of the city.

If the Group Areas Act of 1950 and 1966 denied property ownership rights, except in the homelands, to black South Africans, it also introduced a comprehensive legislative programme which tightened up the procedures for black influx into cities by means of reference books and permit systems. By means of the pass laws the government only allocated a certain number of permits to black people to live in South African cities. The amount of permits issued in Johannesburg was directly related to the amount of labour required in and around Johannesburg. Thus at a time when the American Federal Government was dismantling segregation laws, South Africa was embarking on a government policy of racial segregation. This policy became known as apartheid and resulted not only in bloody conflict with the majority of its own people but ultimately brought the disapprobation of the world to bear on South Africa. Silverman points out that notwithstanding the official policy of 'homeland development' and 'influx control', black people continued to move into the city and given the shortage of housing, started up their own informal settlements or sublet rooms from existing township residents. Apartheid led to the myth of the white city, with the segregated black areas, increasingly congested and alienated, hidden from the vision of most urban whites. A new generation of social historians such as Charles van Onselen[1] have been slowly and surely revealing the other side of Johannesburg's history.

Ironically, a key element in the implementation of apartheid was the so called 'Native Housing Policy'. This led to the allocation of significant amounts of money for new black housing and the development of new black townships. Silverman points out that these townships were intended to replace existing black housing areas either near to or within the white city. Geographically this meant black residential areas were pushed further and further out to the periphery of the city (Silverman 1996: 72). When viewed from an international context South Africa was amongst the leaders in the field of mass austerity housing. But as Chipkin argues, *"from the point of view, however of urban and social development and from the perspective of political economy there is equally no doubt that these policies were a disaster."* (Chipkin 1993: 216). The sprawling monotonous dormitory area devoid of infrastructure and any social amenities on the edge of the city known as the South Western Township and later as Soweto is the principal monument in Johannesburg to the apartheid state.

While housing for black South Africans was very much part of the government domain, housing for whites was largely market driven. The South African urban ideal was much the same as the American and promoted suburban living. The single storey detached house in the centre of a large plot was what white South African families aspired to. The result was low density suburban sprawl. Silverman arques that, *"Dispersion is the pattern of growth in both white city and its surrounding townships. The former is characterised by speculative sprawl, involving higher-income people seeking to privatize amenity and the latter is characterised by the authorities, in order to undertake low-cost housing schemes."* (Silverman 1993: 73).

[1] Van Onselen,C. New Babalon 1982
Van Onselen,C. New Nineveh 1982

## 3.2 Causes of decentralization in Johannesburg:

### 2.2.1 Transportation and Technology:

There are remarkable similarities between the Detroit experience and the Johannesburg situation, namely declining and impoverished inner city centres and rampant suburban sprawl. In both cities many of the causes of decentralization are much the same. White residential suburbs located at some distance from, but still dependant on the inner city, radiated outwards along motorways. Cars in both America and white South Africa were used for the daily commute to work in the inner city. However, sometime in the late sixties and seventies, businesses too started moving out to the suburbs, creating Edge Cities and drawing money and jobs from the centre. It now mattered more that offices were close to the homes of the executives. The governments of both America and South Africa actively contributed to this pattern of decentralization by the construction of state subsidized motorways. The centre emptied, becoming poorer and more crime ridden. Silverman charts this progression as follows, *"The establishment of residential suburbs at some distance from the centre, followed by the relocation of retail to the mall, and finally the movement of manufacturing and offices to the edge has meant that the basic principle of urban order is changing. The guiding forces in the formation of cities – concentration and centralization is giving way to dispersion and fragmentation."* (Silverman 1996:13). The office decentralization nodes in Johannesburg are in Sandton, Bedfordview, Rosebank, Parktown, and in the newly emerging nodes of Dunkeld, Illovo and Midrand.

The dispersion and fragmentation typical of the South African urban experiences as described by Silverman resulted in massive transportation costs. Urban sprawl in America and white South Africa was based on the privately owned motor car. But in a developing country, such as South Africa, this form of transportation is beyond the means of a large proportion of people. Shared minibus taxis have arisen in the short term to satisfy transportation needs, but because of their small capacity, they are relatively expensive. Overloading and reckless driving mean that they are a dangerous option. For people living in Soweto daily transport costs not only for themselves to work but increasingly for their children to formerly white-only government schools in the suburbs consume an enormous percentage of their pay packets.

Like Detroit, recent technological innovations in communication have meant that workers in Johannesburg no longer needed to gather in large offices in the city centre to work efficiently. The recent global shift away from manufacturing towards finance and information technology industries has also had an effect on industrialized cities like Detroit and Johannesburg. It is more convenient for these industries to relocate to the new office nodes in the suburbs. For a developing country with an unskilled workforce, these new industries have created further problems as they require a well educated workforce.

### 3.2.2 Emancipation of Women:

The emancipation of white women in South Africa followed much the same path as that of women in America. The greater number of white women, joining the work force in the 1970s an 1980s, contributed to developers putting up office buildings and shopping malls out beyond the Johannesburg centre. But black women, probably the most oppressed group of the South African population, either worked as domestic servants in white suburbs and lived away from their families in their employers' back yards or traveled long distances from their homes to work in Edge Cities. This has resulted in the dislocation of many black families in Johannesburg.

In recent years black women have moved into the larger workforce and have joined male workers travelling in trains and mini taxis over long distances to work each day.

### 3.2.3 Building Obsolescence / Abandonment:

The inner city of Johannesburg,[1] like Detroit, also suffers from the functional and structural obsolescence of the buildings themselves. Crime is often given as the reason for the unabating business exodus from the central city. But the new fashion for detached low rise high technology offices in garden settings probably caused as much flight from the CBD as crime. It is extremely unlikely even if crime were to disappear from the streets of Johannesburg that these businesses would return to the CBD, after all crime is not confined to the central city but is ubiquitous amongst Johannesburg's sprawling suburbs as well.

Then again certain buildings in Johannesburg became functionally obsolete because they did not allow for the large increase in demand for parking bays. This often rules out the possibility of refurbishing older buildings as they have no deep basements for underground parking. Fred Dielwart points out that one of the causes of decentralization was the prohibitive parking policies of the Johannesburg City Council in the early 1970s. This prevented developers from building parking basements and precipitated business flight to the suburbs where attractive parking ratios were available. Since that time the policy has been reversed and development such as Bank City with basement parking has taken place in the CBD. Unfortunately, an irreversible pattern of decline had already set in. (Dielwart Interview, Jul, 1998).

The flatlands of Hillbrow, Berea and Joubert Park were built in the post World War II era of Le Corbusier architectural design. Le Corbusier was one of the most influential exponents of the Modern Movement particularly with regard to mass housing projects. He was strongly influenced by Marxist-socialist ideology which focused on Carl Marx's idea that city dwellers should live in an egalitarian environment. His *Unite' d' Habitation* project at Marsielles, a block of 337 flats intended to house 1 600 inhabitants is the most practical realization of Le

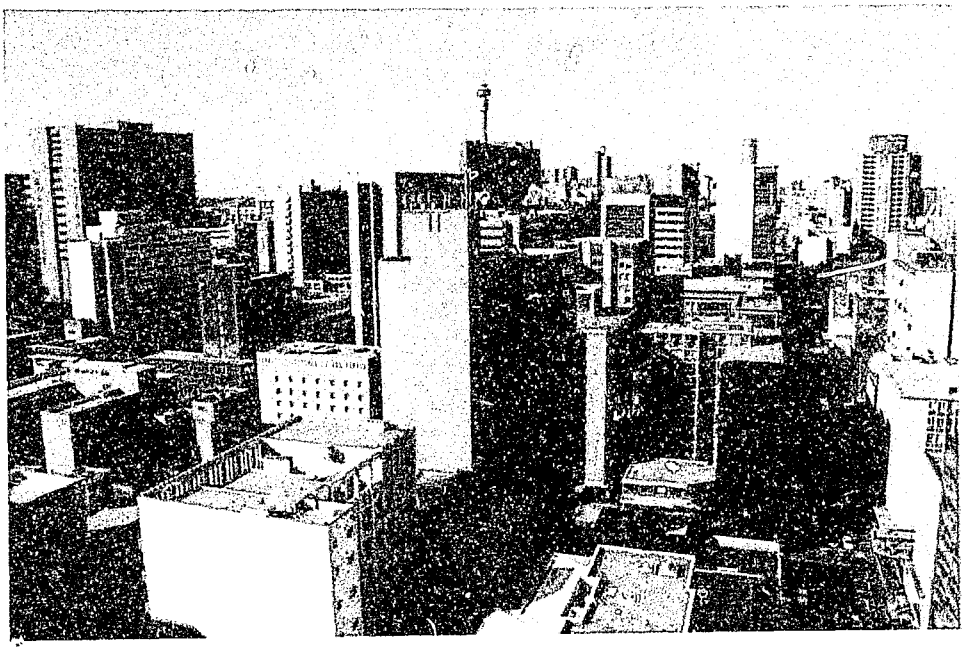
[1] The *central* city refers to what was traditionally called the central business district (CBD).
The *inner city* includes the central city, the immediately adjacent office and industrial area and the residential. areas of Hillbrow, Berea, and Joubert Park

Corbusier's principles. The apartments aroused wide controversy, yet were to influence a generation of architects, including Rex Martienssen and his associates in Johannesburg. Martienssen himself died before the end of the war but his protégés were moving into key design positions and implemented many of Le Corbusier's mass housing ideas in Johannesburg's inner city residential areas. The post war years saw Hillbrow and its environs become a vast testing-ground for Le Corbusier's utopian vision. According to Chipkin, *"Large investment buildings were thrown up to produce returns and to form overcrowding neighbourhoods devoid of social space."* (Chipkin 1993 :228). Giant apartment blocks twelve to fourteen stories high were built in Paul Nel, Bruce, Banket and Goldreich streets and in many other parts of the city. Chipkin goes on to say that, *"Already in the 1960s and even earlier, Hillbrow was being described as one of the most densely populated areas in the Southern Hemisphere. But the trend towards gigantism only gathered momentum at the end of the 1960's and in the subsequent decade when a process of Hongkong-isation became visible at Highpoint (30 storeys) and at Ponte (54 storeys, 173 metres in height)."* (Chipkin, 1993 :241).

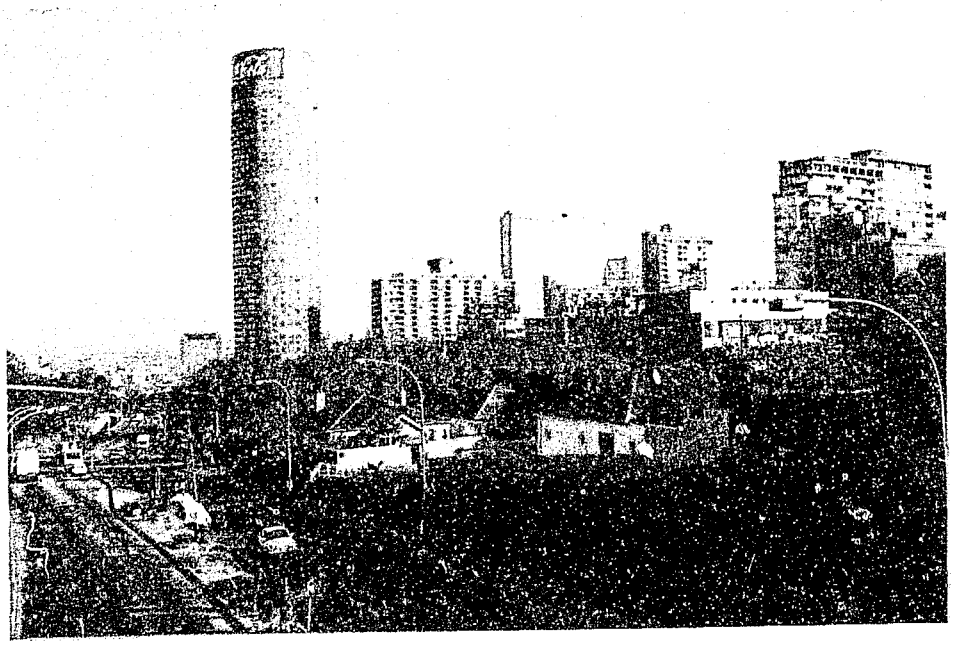
Unfortunately the predilection for impersonal high-rise blocks did not find favour with the persons who lived in them. There is a discussion on at the moment on whether to turn Ponte into a prison for convicts. Perhaps this is an apt metaphor for a style of building, which made residents feel isolated and under threat. The precepts of the Modern Movement which included such ideas as 'bigger is better', 'form follows function', and the 'expert knows best' did not endear the movement to the general public. The mass housing projects and the high rise slowly fell into disfavour. Gradually authorities around the world who had previously been so keen to erect high rise blocks found themselves demolishing the very same buildings. One notable example is the Pruitt-Igoe project (1955 – 1958) in St Louis, Missouri. Hailed as innovative at its conception, it was imploded by controlled explosives, due to the campaign of its residents.

In fairness to Le Corbusier, his high rise designs were not the only flaws that created these tall mountains of poverty and despair. Poor people cannot afford to rehabilitate their homes. Property owners are reluctant to make improvements to existing residential buildings, the prospect being a low return, if any, on capital invested. Mismanaged economics and unemployment are probably the main causes for the typic : degradation seen in these inner city flatlands.

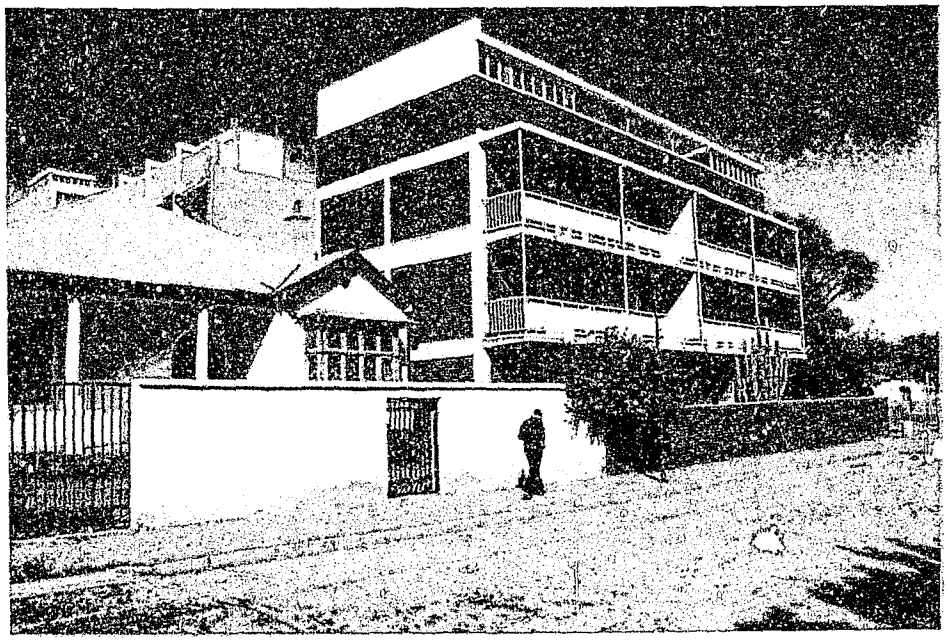
Johannesburg Inner City



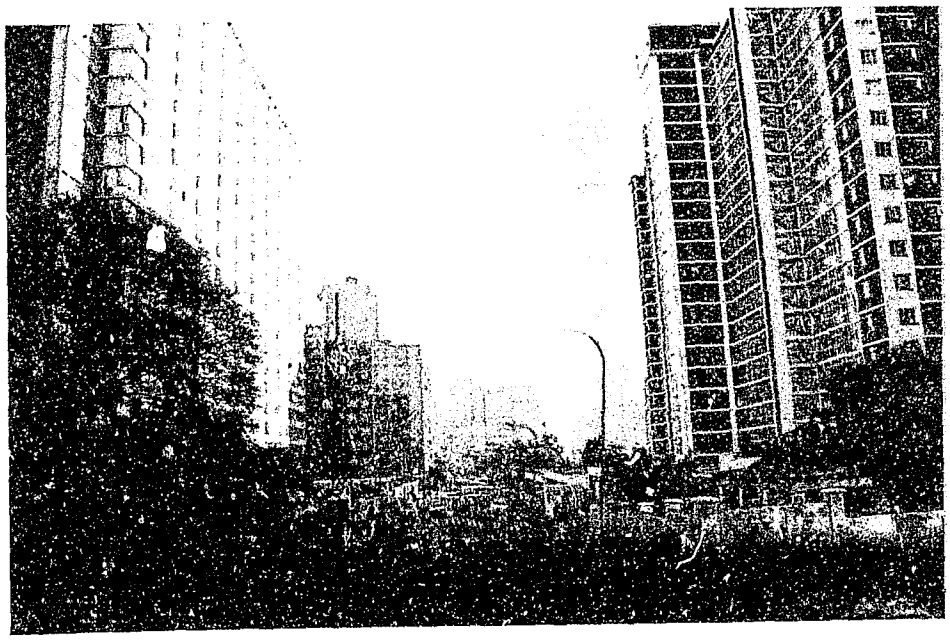
The Ponte 54 storeys, 173 metres in height



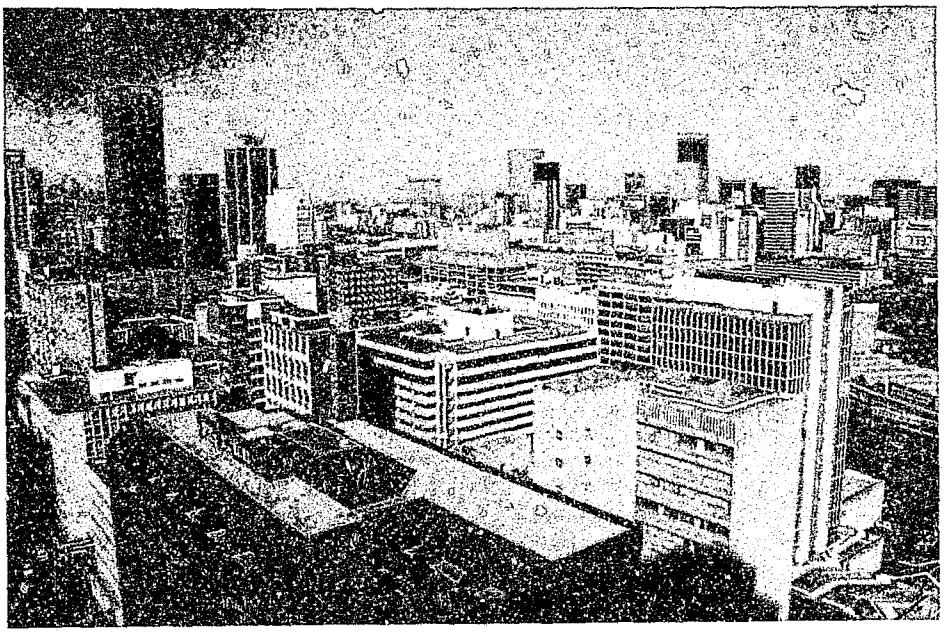
The Pompeii at three storeys high is a more attractive statement of residential town architecture.



Giant apartment blocks in Hillbrow.



Johannesburg CBD.



Informal Trader in Joubert Park



### 3.2.4 Crime:

For the regeneration of Johannesburg's inner city to happen it will need to be made a more attractive place. Like Detroit, Johannesburg centre is perceived as a dangerous place where one is likely to be mugged, if not murdered.

Government attempts to control crime in the inner city have, to date, not been that successful. In January 1998 Smal Street Police Station was closed down, the reason given being that the station was very run down, that its tasks were not being properly carried out and that it was damaging the image of the police service. Corruption is also a problem, with nine policeman being arrested in the Smal Street Police Station during 1997. The government is to install closed circuit cameras to try and reduce crime. (Wrong signal, Business Day, Jan 19, 1998 :9).

Since 1993 the Central Johannesburg Partnership (CJP) has undertaken research into initiatives known in North America as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). Fred Bihl of Amprops said that the first improvement district which subsequently became known as the Central Improvement District (CID) was set up in 1994 and extends from Main to Pritchard street and from Krius to Van Wielligh streets. Since then four additional BIDs have been set up in central Johannesburg. Bihl maintains that the BIDs have had some success in tackling "crime and grime". They also contribute to economic development efforts by generating new jobs for local residents. (Bihl, Interview, Jul 1998). Nevertheless although there may be some improvement in crime and grime in downtown Johannesburg the public perception is still that it is unsafe and dirty.

### 3.2.5 Retail :

As opposed to the Detroit experience, Johannesburg's central r[illegible] trade, despite the growth of major suburban shopping malls has managed not only to survive out to thrive. Retailers have not had success in traditionally black areas and past failures have led to the major retail players largely staying out of townships. The CBD is the favoured shopping destination for township consumers. National retailers like Edgars, Woolworths and Foshini have opened flagship stores, funded by major institutions, in the city centre. But shoppers complain about crime and crowding on the streets and there is not much to do except shop.

It is estimated that there are between 10 000 and 12 000 street hawkers in the city centre. (Makoni, Saturday Star, Mar 13, 1997). There can be no question of removing these informal traders as hawking activity is crucial to the city's African identity and is often the only way for poor people to earn a living. However, informal traders congest the pavements and add to the appearance of chaos in the inner city.

### 3.2.6 Education:

During the apartheid years not only segregated schools but separate departments for black and white education resulted in gross inequality of education for black children. Improving access to educational facilities in a country where such facilities will always be in short supply relative to demand, is of paramount importance. Though central to the ANC's vision of education, the post apartheid vision of neighbourhood schools, where parents are involved in the governing body and the community has strong links with the school, is a rapidly fading dream. For the fact is that more and more parents are sending their children not to township schools but to formerly white-only suburban schools and to private institutions across Johannesburg. While no one can blame parents for wanting a better education for their children, they are paying a heavy price in terms of high fees and extra transport costs. An interesting development in relation to the city of Johannesburg, however, has been that it now serves as a pivot between areas of residence and schools. As the latter have become increasingly dislocated, the city centre of Johannesburg has become the link that ties these two locations together, as transport to and from schools generally passes through this area. Many, if not the majority of learners travel through the centre of Johannesburg each working day.

### 3.2.7 Politics:

The elections of 1994 brought a democratic black majority government into power in South Africa. In 1995 the 13 racially defined local government bodies falling within the Johannesburg metropolitan area were collapsed into the eastern, western, northern and southern metropolitan local councils (MLCs), with a Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council (GJTMC) in addition. The MLCs were drawn with boundaries specifically to ensure that some relatively well-endowed areas would sustain extensive low-income areas. The scheme provided the most populous area, the Southern MLC, which included Soweto, with the central city. Historically township residents had boycotted rents and services in protest against the apartheid local government and had grown accustomed to non-payment. Tomlinson points out that the new local governments (MLCs) were beset by difficulties. *"The democratic transition did not see a sudden resumption of services payments in places like Soweto."* He goes on to say that the introduction of uniform rates throughout the metropolitan area led to a dramatic increase in rates (in some cases, up to 300%) in places like Sandton and a sudden spread of the rates boycott to former white suburbs. Suburbanites objected that they were contributing more than their fair share in redistribution transfers due to the Southern MLCs not forcing residents to pay for services (Tomlinson 1998:9). All this led to drastic financial difficulties for local government. *"The end result is that the city would be hard pressed to rationalise concessions for the central city, especially when the most dire incidences of poverty are in the townships and squatter camps."* (Tomlinson 1998:9).

Adding to the problem the division of labour between the MLCs and the GJTMC and the role of the GJTMC in co-ordinating inner city development were premised on the principal of co-

### 3.2.6 Education:

During the apartheid years not only segregated schools but separate departments for black and white education resulted in gross inequality of education for black children. Improving access to educational facilities in a country where such facilities will always be in short supply relative to demand, is of paramount importance. Though central to the ANC's vision of education, the post apartheid vision of neighbourhood schools, where parents are involved in the governing body and the community has strong links with the school, is a rapidly fading dream. For the fact is that more and more parents are sending their children not to township schools but to formerly white-only suburban schools and to private institutions across Johannesburg. While no one can blame parents for wanting a better education for their children, they are paying a heavy price in terms of high fees and extra transport costs. An interesting development in relation to the city of Johannesburg, however, has been that it now serves as a pivot between areas of residence and schools. As the latter have become increasingly dislocated, the city centre of Johannesburg has become the link that ties these two locations together, as transport to and from schools generally passes through this area. Many, if not the majority of learners travel through the centre of Johannesburg each working day.

### 3.2.7 Politics:

The elections of 1994 brought a democratic black majority government into power in South Africa. In 1995 the 13 racially defined local government bodies falling within the Johannesburg metropolitan area were collapsed into the eastern, western, northern and southern metropolitan local councils (MLCs), with a Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council (GJTMC) in addition. The MLCs were drawn with boundaries specifically to ensure that some relatively well-endowed areas would sustain extensive low-income areas. The scheme provided the most populous area, the Southern MLC, which included Soweto, with the central city. Historically township residents had boycotted rents and services in protest against the apartheid local government and had grown accustomed to non-payment. Tomlinson points out that the new local governments (MLCs) were beset by difficulties. *"The democratic transition did not see a sudden resumption of services payments in places like Soweto."* He goes on to say that the introduction of uniform rates throughout the metropolitan area led to a dramatic increase in rates (in some cases, up to 300%) in places like Sandton and a sudden spread of the rates boycott to former white suburbs. Suburbanites objected that they were contributing more than their fair share in redistribution transfers due to the Southern MLCs not forcing residents to pay for services (Tomlinson 1998:9). All this led to drastic financial difficulties for local government. *"The end result is that the city would be hard pressed to rationalise concessions for the central city, especially when the most dire incidences of poverty are in the townships and squatter camps."* (Tomlinson 1998:9).

Adding to the problem the division of labour between the MLCs and the GJTMC and the role of the GJTMC in co-ordinating inner city development were premised on the principal of co-

operation. However, the Southern MLC resisted the role of the GJTMC and there was seldom easy co-ordination with the other MLCs, this despite the fact that all the government bodies were controlled by the ANC. (Tomlison 1998: 10). Responding to these problems, the Central Government Department of Constitutional Development published a white paper on Local Government in March 1998 that required the introduction of one local government body for the whole of the Johannesburg metropolitan area. In America, suburban governments are elected by people who have fled the inner city, predominantly white middle income earners, city governments are elected by the people left behind, most of them poor and black. This results in revenues being unfairly distributed. In contrast, Johannesburg's new metropolitan superstructure will have the potential to distribute resources more evenly. The extensive boundaries of Greater Johannesburg would include both affluent suburbs, the emergent Edge Cities of Sandton, Randburg and Midrand, the inner city and the old impoverished black townships. The Municipal Structures Bill (the second piece of draft legislation to emerge from the white paper on local government) further proposes that regional metropolitan councils in metropolitan areas be collapsed into a single municipality with administrative, executive and legislative powers. Greater Johannesburg, Petoria, Khayalami and Vaal Lekoa in Gauteng would become a "category A" metropolitan area, commonly known as a megacity. (Russell, Star, May 25,1998 :2). In theory these new enlarged boundaries present an attempt at more racial equality as well as an effort to promote a more even spread of revenue.

## 3.3 Attempts at Urban Renewal:

### 3.3.1 The redevelopment of blighted residential areas:

*"Moreover, the process of urbanization is continuing apace: people, particularly (despite vigorous attempts historically to prevent this) African people are flooding to the urban areas and most "guestimates" of growth hold that some 26 million people will live in South African cities by the turn of the century. The majority of this growth will inevitably occur around the four major metropolitan areas (the Pretoria, Witwatersrand – Vereeniging area, Cape Town, Durban Pinetown and Port Elizabeth – Uitenhage, which are currently growing very much faster than the smaller settlements."* (Dewar et al 1991: 10).

Urban growth on this scale will mean that people will need to be accommodated in the city. Silverman points out that the spatial formation being perpetuated since the election of a democratic government in 1994 is dispersion, *"Current public sector initiatives seem to favour the periphery. Projects being undertaken in terms of the Reconstruction and Development Programme are overwhelmingly located in townships and squatter camps, with little money being set aside for the inner city."* (Silverman 1996: 67). But the fragmented nature of the township areas means that they are highly inconvenient, particularly for the huge number of people without cars. Transport costs, although heavily subsidized in the case of public transportation, consume an enormous portion of a poor person's wage packet.

Unlike Detroit, the inner city of Johannesburg has seen a substantial increase in its residential population. Therefore decentralization in this context does not refer to a decrease in the population at the centre but rather to the exodus of middle class white South Africans out of the inner city flatlands to the suburbs. In the early 1980s the exodus of white South Africans to the suburbs was facilitated by the introduction of a new state housing subsidy. This was the First Time Homeowner's Scheme which assisted young whites to become homeowners. Because the subsidy applied only to first-time home owners and newly built homes it encouraged young whites to buy homes in new suburbs. It is likely that this subsidy redirected young white adults towards building new homes instead of renting flats in inner city areas such as Hillbrow, Berea and Joubert Park. (Silverman 1996: 48). Enforced residential segregation came under increasing pressure in the 1980s due largely to the de facto movement of blacks into the so called white city. One of the reasons is the surplus of housing for whites in the greater Johannesburg region, including the municipalities of Sandton, Kempton park, Germiston and Alberton leading to a vacuum in the Joubert Park, Berea and Hillbrow flatlands.

Another reason for black people moving into the inner city was to escape the escalating violence in the townships from 1976 onwards. It was also easier to travel to and from the new workplaces in Rosebank, Sandton, Edenvale and Randburg from the city centre. The scrapping of the pass laws and the old homelands system has resulted in severe overcrowding both in the inner city residential areas and the old townships

Tomlinson points out that the new residents of the inner city are relatively well off, although generally poorer than those they replaced. While Detroit inner city is virtually synonymous with low income, largely minority neighbourhoods, the inner city of Johannesburg is not where

poverty is concentrated. Due to the nature of the apartheid city, poverty is still concentrated on the urban periphery in Soweto. Unlike the American central city, a residential location in the Johannesburg central city offers far superior access to jobs with prospects. *"The unemployment rate in the inner-city of 16% is half the provincial level."* (Tomlinson 1998:8). Perhaps the most serious issue facing the development of residential zones within the inner city is the financial pressure on municipal government. The amalgamation of former white and black authorities has meant increasing deficits in municipal operating budgets.

**Landlord / Tenant relationships.** Associated with blighted residential areas is a high incidence of socio-economic problems. Outwards signs of some of these problems are lack of proper maintenance of structures and criminal behaviour. If major rehabilitation of residential areas is to be stimulated the attitudes of large sections of the population will have to change. Obtaining widespread interest in renewal activities depends on intensive community organization. Enlisting the support of government and other social agencies to make available their pool of trained people is another important factor in urban renewal. A broad educational programme needs to be initiated to improve attitudes towards property maintenance. One reason for this is that many people in the central city are immigrants from rural areas generally ignorant of urban living. Johannesburg Health Chief, Angela Mathee, says her department prefers to educate rather than punish, *"Many people need to be taught about the inner-city system; that you don't throw cans or chicken bones down the toilet; that you need to keep the windows open for ventilation and health; that as a resident you have responsibilities for cleaning up waste."* (Fife, Financial Mail, Oct 24, 1997: 72).

Tomlinson, however argues that the large majority of new (black) inner city residents has a history of urban living: *" Two-thirds of central city households were born in the outlying townships, mostly in Gauteng. The balance comprises the recent arrival of people born in rural areas, there remaining a class of labour migrants, in the central city and growing neighbourhoods of people from thoughout sub-Saharan Africa."* (Tomlinson 1998:8).

The deterioration of buildings in the Hillbrow, Joubert Park, Berea areas create, in some cases, a nightmare for landlords, hampering their ability to collect rent and service fees. Landlords are reluctant to spend money on rehabilitating buildings where there is little chance of returns. Adding to the problem some landlords have absconded with rental and service monies in an attempt to realize their assets. Keith Peacock, Eastern MLC of rates administration, has found common ownership of many buildings where such tactics have been used. He estimates that the twenty owners he is dealing with owe about R 50m in service areas. (Goldberg, Financial Mail, Feb 13, 1998: 66). Organisations playing a largely unsuccessful mediation role up to the present are the S.A. National Civics Organisation, Actstop and the Johannesburg Organised Tenants Association. It is alleged that some of these groups have organsied tenants to intimidate or defy landlords. In terms of the proposed amendment to the new Residential, Landlord and Tenant Act (1997), intimidation by either landlords or tenants carries a maxium fine of R 50 000 or three years imprisonment. It is unlikely tenants facing such heavy penalties will be bullied into this kind of behaviour in future. (Goldberg, Financial Mail, Feb 13, 1998: 66).

Suprisingly enough, tenants do not *"rank conflict with landlords as a major issue."* (Tomlinson 1998:8) Gauteng Housing Department's, Policy Assistant Director Rory Gallocher, reports that while most complaints are lodged by tenants, the main themes are lack of urban management, cut-offs because of services arrears and the presence of criminal elements. (Goldberg, Financial Mail, Feb 13, 1998: 66). Gallocher has asked the Johannesburg

Metropolitan Government to consider the expropriation of four abandoned buildings with a view to forming housing associations to provide affordable accommodation for city dwellers. (Goldberg, Financial Mail, Feb 13, 1998: 66). Non-payment of service arrears in the high rise flatlands of Berea, Hillbrow and Joubert Park will not effectively be solved by the implementation of stringent legislation, as non-payment is a typical trait of residential slum areas. Legitimate tenants need to be educated on leases, building management and maintenance. Government needs to focus on the social problems rather than the consequences. Stringent legislation is necessary in the short term to bring back some form of law and order to the areas, but long term solutions to resolving the problem of poverty within the inner city need to be implemented.

**The hazards of residential redevelopment schemes.** It is worth analysing a redevelopment scheme which the Johannesburg City Council attempted to implement in the early 1990s, to understand some of the hazards inherent in such schemes. The eastern sector of the inner city, where dozens of overcrowded 1930s low rise apartment buildings exist, became the focus for an ambitious urban renewal scheme. Originally, the built environment in the east of Johannesburg centre housed low income whites as well as factory premises for small-scale manufacturing enterprises. (Steinberg et al, 1992: 274 in Smith, 1992). In the early 1990s with the erosion of the Group Areas Act some of these residential buildings became occupied entirely by illegal black residents. One result was a marked decline in the value of housing stock leaving widespread squalor. Even on the rooftops of these buildings can be seen the cardboard shacks of poor unemployed and working families.

The City Council envisaged a process whereby large corporations purchased the buildings, restored them and then sold them to their employees. The prime targets were the black middle income earners and the upper strata of the black working class. The idea was sectional title ownership of flats in slightly refurbished tenements. The council's scheme would have resulted in the movement of employed black people into the inner city but would also have moved out the structurally unemployed. An increase in evictions of poor tenants was the one predictable outcome of the process. In one typical case, in an effort to upgrade the building, rents were raised for run down single rooms in Polly Lodge from R 88 per month to R 450 per month, resulting in Actstop (representing the inner city poor residents) constructing tents outside for dislodged victims and erecting signs demanding, "Nationalize the buildings". (Steinberg et al, 1992 :276 in Smith, 1992).

The whole process may be compared to the *Lafayette Park* development in Detroit. It is all very well upgrading a residential area but what happens to the original poor inhabitants? The contradictions and difficulties in the process become apparent. After the dismantling of apartheid there still remain vast social discrepancies between the "haves" and "have nots". As mentioned earlier it is of the utmost importance to help people out of their economic predicament by creating more economic opportunities. The government and private enterprise will have to address the socio – economic problems of the inner city to avoid the urban conflict experienced by Detroit and other American cities in the 1960s. In the words of John F Kennedy, *"We neglect our cities at our peril, for neglecting them we neglect the nation."*[1]

[1] Maxwell Meyerson, Memorable Quotations of John F Kennedy (New York, 1965), pp 250-251

### 3.3.2 The renewal of the central business district or CBD:

Like Detroit, Johannesburg has seen an outflow of businesses from the CBD. The relocation of many of South Africa's top companies to Edge Cities on the periphery has jeopardized the city's rate generating ability. Director Andrew Bradford of the property consultancy firm Bradford, McCormack and Associates says, *"Although 76% of the top 100 companies* [in 1997] *have head offices in Gauteng only 7% are located in the Johannesburg CBD compared with at least 26% in late 1993."* (Mnyanda, Business Day, Jul 30, 1997). Bradford goes on to say that although the post-apartheid city centre has changed its focus towards the mass-market retailing sector, its ability to generate revenue, in the form of rates, *"lies largely in the value of its commercial buildings."* (Mnyanda, Business Day, Jul 30, 1997).

But the signs for an inner city commercial revival are not that auspicious. Sapoa[1] maintains that while theoretically it makes sense to move back to the CBD, with A-grade rentals at R65/$m^2$ in the suburbs compared to R30/$m^2$ in the city, this trend is happening only on a very small scale. But, there are some predictions supported by Old Mutual's Research Chief, Gil da Silva, of some business returning to the CBD. This is the result of limited office space now available in Sandton, Rosebank and Revonia, which now have vacancies below 5%. According to Da Silva, *"The main problem is to change the perceptions of crime and deterioration in the CBD, as they are nothing but perceptions."* (Fife, Financial Mail, Nov 21, 1997).

The fact remains however that demand for office space in the CBD remains low.[2] Tomlinson argues that the parallels with American cities are most evident in the decline in Johannesburg's CBD. *" Office vacancies have increased, rents have fallen and property values have plummeted."* (Tomlinson 1998: 1). Institutional talk of markets for commercial property investment is probably driven by the fact that the institutions have significant investments in the CBD area. The reality is that South Africa's major financial institutions have been slowly reducing their exposure to property investments in the inner city. Sanlam, one of the biggest property investors in South Africa with a portfolio valued at about R12 billion has frozen all further investment in Johannesburg's CBD, until the exodus of companies to decentralized office nodes has been reversed. Anglo America Properties (Amprops) made a similar decision after the loss of business tenants in the CBD dragged it into a R49 million loss for the year end of March 1996. Lukanyo Mnyanda warns that this may have resulted in city centre buildings losing up to 50% of their value. (Mnyanda, Business Day, April 16, 1997).

Some of the major mining houses and banks are remaining in the CBD. First National Bank (FNB) has redeveloped five city blocks for its head office. The Standard Bank is also committed to the CBD, with its "Superblock" straddling Simmonds street. Absa too is expanding its Main Street head office, at a cost of R 450m. (Cohen, Financial Mail, Nov 14, 1997). But large developments such as the FNB headquarters tend to become isolated islands, rather like the *Renaissance Centre* in Detroit and apart from city taxes, contribute little to the life of the downtown area. They are places to which white collar workers drive their cars in the morning, park in deep parking basements and from whence, after the days work they emerge and drive their cars home to suburbia. American models for city centre revitalization such as

[1] The South African Property owners assocaition (SAPOA) represents about 90% of property owners with A grade and Bgrade space in the inner city and 80% of property owners in the northern suburbs in 1998.
[2] See fig. 1 and 2

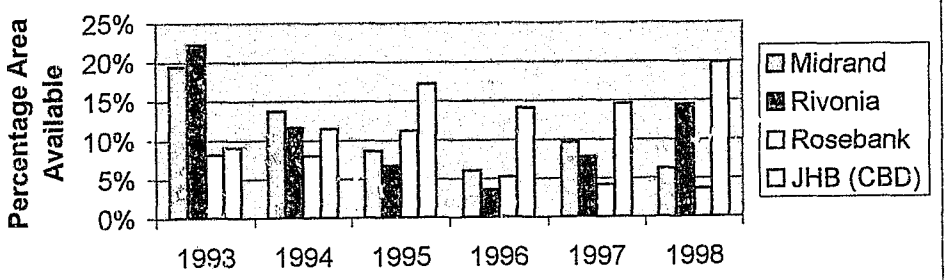
the *Renaissance Centre* and large banking "Superblocks" have not addressed inner city poverty.

The Johannesburg central city has also experienced a loss of manufacturing industries. Decentralization was further spurred by heavy industries such as textiles, pulp and paper and chemicals requiring larger premises than the earlier consumer goods industries. It was also important that these industries had access to the motorway system, therefore large factories were built not in the centre but in the industrial zones along motorways. It was now equally important that industries should be located close to an international airport like Johannesburg International Airport rather than in the city centre.

## 3.3.2 Statistics:

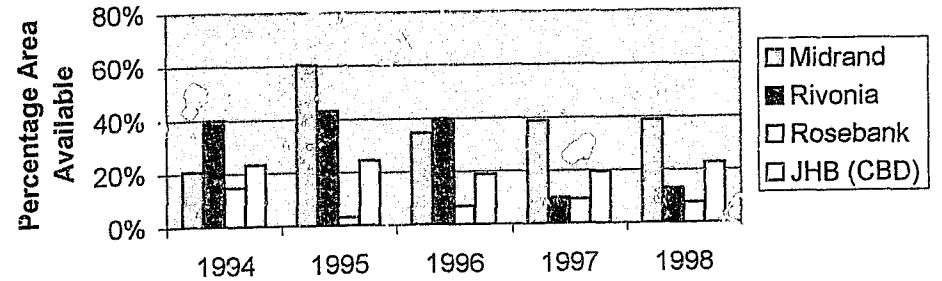
The following bar charts (fig. 1 and 2) show Grade A and Grade B office vacancy rates for the Johannesburg CBD. An interesting factor is that although the 1998 Grade A vacancy rates have significantly increased, Grade B vacancy rates have hardly altered from previous years. This is largely the result of black professionals and black medium businesses moving into B Grade offices in the CBD.

**FIG 1**
**Grade A Vacancy Rates**




Information suplied by SAPOA

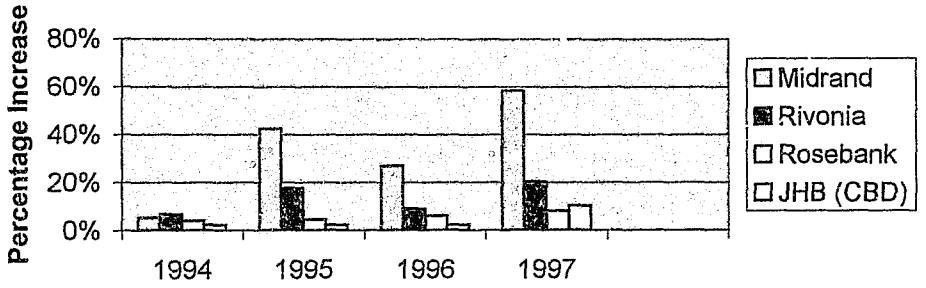
**FIG 2**
**Grade B Vacancy Rates**




Information suplied by SAPOA

The following bar chart (fig.3) shows the more distant the decentralized node of Edge City is from the Johannesburg CBD the greater the development.

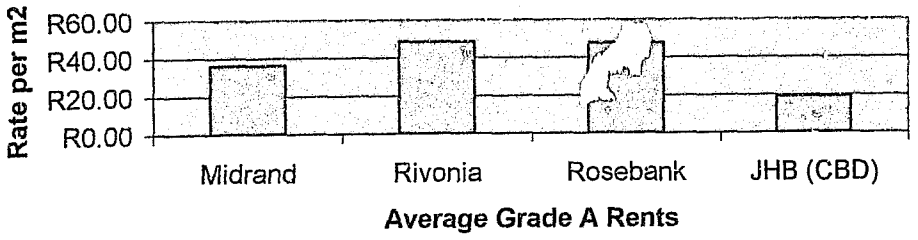
**FIG 3**
**Percentage Increase of Total Rentable Area (Grade A) Per Year**




Information suplied by SAPOA

The following bar chart (fig. 4) shows that rentals are now substantially higher in the northern development nodes such as Midrand, Rivonia and Rosebank, which theoretically should allow the CBD to once again become competitive and commercially attractive

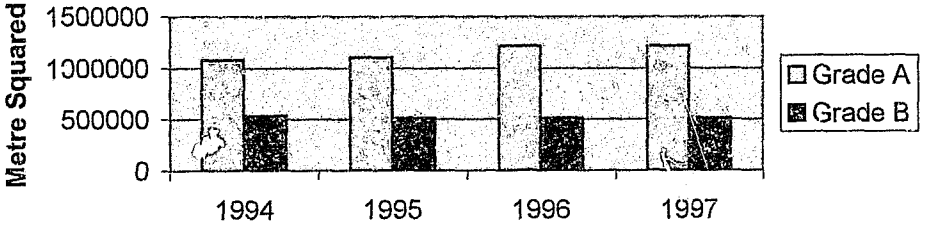
**FIG 4**
**Grade A Average Rents for the 3rd Quarter ending August 1998**




Information from the Rode Report

The following bar chart (fig. 5) illustrates that there is significantly more Grade A than Grade B office space in the Johannesburg CBD

**FIG 5**
**Comparison between Grade A and Grade B Total Rentable Area.**




Information suplied by SAPOA

# 5 Conclusion:

*"The overwhelming need is to turn South African cities into efficient economic machines."* (Dewar et al, 1991:16).

The debate central to urban planning is that between decentralization on the one hand and on the other hand, concentration and the compact city. The origin of suburban living can be found in the reaction to the environmental degradation in cities, which accompanied the Industrial Revolution. It was inspired by the passion for nature expressed by Romantic artists and writers. In England, Ebenezer Howard's 'Garden City' pioneered well designed environmentally attractive housing for the working class. His proposal in 1898 was an enlightened programme of new towns, based in the countryside, in the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement.

In America, Frank Lloyd Wright was influential in decentralizing the population. In creating a more even distribution of the population he hoped to establish a more harmonious relationship between man and nature, which would have been impossible, as Wright himself recognised, before the mass ownership of the motorcar. The North American suburban bungalow was based on his 'Prairies Style' house designs. His emphasis on decentralization set him apart from Le Corbusier, whose scheme for an ideal city was based on the principal of increasing population density in the inner city.

These two men, Le Corbusier, the European, and Frank Lloyd Wright, the American, are largely responsible for the way cities look today. Le Corbusier claimed that to build suburban satellites around a great city would mean the ultimate demise of the city. His plans for the 'Ville Radieuse' 1922-25 (Shining City) advocated rows of identical skyscrapers positioned on geometric grids. His utopian city included business towers and large residential apartment blocks. Wright's counter proposal, 'Broadacre City' 1953, can be seen not as a city but as an anti-city argument. His vision was overwhelmingly low density, with a minimum of an acre set aside for each family. In both America and South Africa with seemingly unlimited land available for human habitation, the solution to the problem of the industrialized city seemed to lie in suburban development.

Joel Garreau, a modern commentator on the patterns of cities, accepts aspects of decentralisation. He questions the conventional wisdom that contemporary patterns of dispersion are part of the problem and posits that Edge Cities are in fact part of the solution. Like Wright he emphasises the convenience of the motor car and the highway. He argues that Edge Cities can be viewed as more suited to late twentieth century lifestyles than more traditional cities, *"Their* [developers'] *unshakeable observation was this: if they gave the people what they wanted, the people would give them money. The crazy guilt of Edge Cities made perfect sense if you understood the place as the manifest pattern of millions of individual desires."* (Garreau 1991:222).

In contrast, another American, Anthony Downs, argues that the flight of the middle class, black and white to the suburbs has meant the relegation of many poor households and minorities to destitute inner city neighbourhoods. Suburbanites feel emotionally detached from the inner city and hostile to the city's fiscal and social problems. They guard their social and physical

separation from the poor with an array of political forces (zoning regulations, building codes etc) which ensure that the poor stay where they are. He warns that this threatens the long term viability of American society. One way to counteract the adverse effects of fragmentation is to adopt region wide government structures, so called metropolitan government. But American suburban officials and residents are strongly opposed to metropolitan government. Powerful people and institutions in America have vested interests in continuing to allow unlimited low density development. He warns that there is no quick fix, despite recognising the failings of unlimited low density growth, he views it as a mistake to adopt the opposite policies. He advocates limited spread mixed density growth with designated green belts, more suburban housing for low income households and a major federal funding of nation wide programs that disproportionately aid central cities and their residents. Perhaps most importantly, he calls for a fundamental change in attitude on the part of middle class suburbanites to the underclass in the inner city.

In South Africa, Melinda Silverman argues that we should accept the contemporary city for what it is, a fractured, dispersed place. She does not even like the term urban sprawl as she sees it as pejorative and too emotional. She prefers the term dispersion. She also calls for limited spread mixed density growth with more areas set aside in the suburbs for poorer households. She posits the building of a new post-apartheid city on the north eastern edge of the Johannesburg metropolitan region, between the emerging nodes of Midrand and the Johannesburg international airport.

In contrast to Silverman, David Dewar calls for a return to the compact city. He insists that instead of continually pushing the urban edge further outwards, densities should be increased. He believes the sprawling system wastes the country's scarce resources, such as land, energy and finance. Further the solution to the transportation problem is to promote "intensive cities" as opposed to "extensive" ones to ensure that the urban environment works well at a pedestrian level. *"The primary physical barrier to ease of access is the cost of overcoming the friction of distance. The best situation obtains when people can gain access to most necessary daily activities on foot."* (Dewar et al, 1991 :17). Dewar argues that if the South African urban poor are to gain physical access to opportunities generated by cities an efficient public transportation system is a necessity. *"The degree to which urban living is dependent upon the car defines the degree to which the poor are spatially marginalized and materially impoverished by city form. The technology of movement therefore must be accessible to all."* (Dewar et al, 1991 :17). In particular the need to improve the lot of black women is another good reason for compacting the city and developing more efficient transport systems. Long-distance travel to their places of work has meant that their leisure and family time is extremely restricted. Dewar also believes that the compact city favours small entrepreneurs. Conversely, in sprawling urban systems, because the lower the volume of output, the larger the proportion of distribution costs to total costs, small scale activities are unable to survive. In addition, in such systems, places of economic opportunity only occur at a limited number of points, namely at the intersections of transport channels. But these places tend to be dominated by larger enterprises which can afford the higher rents. Indeed very large commercial concerns have such great drawing power that they can locate almost anywhere. *"In a real sense, therefore, sprawling low-density forms of development and diffuse markets, encourage economic oligopolization."* (Dewar et al, 1991:45).

In fact, the roots of our dispersed cities in South Africa lie in the policies of *apartheid.* South Africa's homeland policy was essentially a decentralization policy, designed to favour the white minority. This fragmentation resulted in the inefficiency and inequity of the apartheid

city. As Tomlinson points out, *" The sprawling settlements outside the city impose severe time and money costs on the movement of people and because the land is zoned for one use only, the settlements forego entrepreneurial opportunities."* (Tomlinson 1994:12). This seems to suggest that the emphasis of future planning policy in the Johannesburg metropolitan area should be on managing urban concentration rather than deconcentration.

David Rusk argues that in many American metro areas racially motivated *"white flight"* was a major factor in suburban growth and *" with all of its new suburbs outside the city limits ...the city of Detroit is* [now] *75 per cent black."* (Rusk 1993:29). He defines racial and economic segregation as being at the heart of America's urban problems. Rusk like many other American urban experts posits that the surest way to reverse patterns of urban decline is to create metro governments but warns that larger government is not necessarily more efficient government.

There is much debate, however, as to whether the megacity concept can be successfully applied to Johannesburg. Ann Bernstein, Executive Director of the Centre for Development and Enterprise, cautions that the sheer size of the megacity will lead to inefficiencies, because of the complexity of the administration required in very large centralised systems. There is the added danger of a large metropolitan government loosing contact with local communities. This would undermine commitment to the democratic process and reduce the sense of effective participation of communities. It is worth while analysing in some detail her views on the local government white paper proposals. She acknowledges that in large urban areas it can be very useful to have a metropolitan level of government that provides region-wide services, for instance water, sewerage and electricity and performs region-wide functions, such as land and transport planning. This level of government can be directly elected by the metropolitan electorate or indirectly through local councils. She believes, however that the megacity concept will not be able to provide the reassurance that business and investors require before undertaking risk ventures in a city. (Bernstein, Business Day, Jun 2, 1998).

In contrast to Ann Bernstein, Neil Fraser is of the opinion that for the inner city the megacity concept promises many advantages. It will co-ordinate the metropolitan planning of new commercial and retail development, allowing for zoning restrictions which in turn will help in the process of limiting urban sprawl. It will also, as a result of redistribution, allow for more money to be allocated to the inner city. (Fraser, Interview, Aug 1998).

**Tax.** The reality in greater Johannesburg is that there is extreme poverty in the south and west of the city and extreme wealth in the north. The megacity argument is that the city must be able to use resources and income for the benefit of everyone in the area. Ann Berstein argues that there also needs to be an investigation into other sources of finances for greater Johannesburg, as the revenue generated locally will never be enough. *" However, because of our history local authorities should also receive infrastructure and service subsidies from central government. In other words, most redistribution will happen at the central level of government and be allocated to the local level. These subsidies from the national fiscus can be used by the local authority to buy additional services from the metropolitan level, provide a higher quality of service itself or subsidize the prices of such services."* ( Bernstein, Business Day, Jun 2, 1998).

The scrapping of the pass laws and the Group Areas Act has meant that now Johannesburg's inner city is overwhelmingly an African city. It is estimated that the overall population of the major metropolitan areas in South Africa will increase almost threefold during the period 1980 – 2000 (Urban foundation 1990a quoted in Tomlinson 1994:231). We are in a period of fundamental transition towards a large predominantly black urban population. Johannesburg's

most pressing development challenge of the future will focus upon the ability of the city to accommodate this rapidly expanding population. Property developers mindful of the number of office buildings standing empty are already considering the possibility of converting them to residential use. According to Old Mutual Properties' Assistant General Manager Ian Watt, there is no shortage of properties fit for conversion. There is nearly 2 million $m^2$ of older empty office space (C and D grade offices) available, which would if converted to flats help meet the National Housing Department's annual target of creating 350 000 homes. (Goldberg, Financial Mail, Oct 24, 1997). The motivation behind conversion is not solely to provide cheap accommodation but also to revitalize neighbouring shops and other commercial activity boosting employment and taxes within the inner city.

Director of Uptown Projects, Clive Cope, estimates that the conversion from offices to flats that will sell from R 40 000 or rent at R 500/month will cost R 1000/$m^2$. The idea is that a group of tenants use their R 15 000 state subsidies to buy a dilapidated building. They would then use their incomes to pay monthly rentals which would cover conversion costs as well as services. (Goldberg, Financial Mail, Aug 01, 1997). Revolving funds, financed by the Inner City Housing Upgrade Trust (Ichut), a bridging finance body funded by the Johannesburg City Council and Amprops, are intended to provide interest free loans or deferred payment arrangements, to help developers with initial conversion costs. The National Housing Finance Corporation (NHFC), a government agency that lends indirectly to those earning less than R 3 500 a month, believes the target market in Johannesburg should be those earning R 1 200 – R 4 000 a month. With help from state housing subsidies they would be able to afford rents of R 500 – R 700 a month. (Goldberg, Financial Mail, Oct 24, 1997). Rental housing will allow for greater job mobility and will remove the burden of long term mortgages for poor people. Many black people living in Johannesburg do not wish to own homes in the city, which is often viewed as a transitory place of work, preferring to invest in property in the rural areas where their families are based.

Robert Fee, an architect involved with the Johannesburg West City Initiative, which comprises a group of professionals, stresses the importance of attracting middle class black residents to the city. As Tomlinson points out, *"The best known* [American] *urban success stories are also the cities where income inequality is greatest."* (Tomlinson 1998: 12) The Johannesburg West City Initiative has entered into negotiations with Johnnic and Rand Mines Properties, which own the equivalent of 22 city blocks in the south western sector of the central city, to explore the development potential of the land. It is envisaged as a mixed-use area consisting of middle income residential developments together with some retail and commercial development. (Fee, Interview, Aug 1998).

However a precondition for attracting middle class families would be to provide a quality education in the inner city. Research by property market analysts such as Planet and Urban Development Studies shows a drift among middle income black home buyers to areas closer to the city. Their main reasons for moving into the inner city are firstly better schooling, mostly in model C schools such as Jeppe Boys' High School and secondly, reduced transport costs. (Goldberg, Financial Mail, Feb 07, 1997). Due to the public transport system converging on the inner city and the availability of cheap premises in the inner city, it is ideally located for the establishment of an educational centre. Such an educational centre would provide creches, primary schools, secondary schools, adult educational centres and libraries, all in close proximity. Public libraries should be located in such a way that they are easy accessible and can serve a number of schools, as the reality is that most schools are increasingly under provided with books. In order further to reduce costs, facilities such as sports fields,

recreational halls and places for extra-curricula educational activities such as art and drama could be shared by a number of schools.

It is perhaps with regard to education that we can learn most from the American experience. The Detroit inner city public schools are failing in their task of education. It would appear that schooling works better if there is a degree of state and private sponsorship of schools. Partnership between state and private educational bodies such as Catholic schools may provide the quality schooling so desperately needed not only by the children of the city but also by the children of Soweto. It may be possible to implement the voucher system into the educational system of the inner city. The voucher system in America enables children from poor families to buy education in private institutes, in other words, it is a way in which the state helps sponsor private schools. In South Africa the government subsidizes private schools by way of grants but this does not always mean that poorer children benefit from these grants. As educational vouchers are only provided to poor children, it means that the grants go to those who need them most. The charter system in America may be compared to the model C school system in South Africa, which allows more parent participation and some private sponsorship of state schools. Unfortunately in Michigan the charter system is opposed by the teacher unions who feel threatened by it.

The second prerequisite for attracting middle income residents to the inner city is better security. The most urgent improvements needed include more visible policing, greater control of informal traders, and improved levels of cleanliness. Ultimately, Johannesburg's long term survival lies in its residential and retail trade sectors. The extensive public transport infrastructure converging on the inner city means that it is ideally located to become a major retail centre for the African market. *" It is estimated 790 000 commuters enter the inner-city every working day."* (Tomlinson, 1998: 4). A vibrant inner city residential sector would also provide additional markets for the city's retail sector with between 111 000 and 112 000 estimated to be living in the city already.[1] (Myanda, Business Day, Feb 18, 1998). One of the consequences of "crime and grime" has been the loss of valuable trade to Edge City shopping malls. According to Garreau, suburban shopping malls are designed to make shoppers, "specifically women", feel safe. (Garreau, 1991:46). Roger Hands, operations manager for the informal-sector development in Greater Johannesburg's economic development department says, that with regard to informal traders, the first phase is to legislate hawking and trading in the inner city The second phase, arising from an in-depth sociological study, now under way, is to generate a general management plan and strategy relating to street trading. Part of the strategy is to identify sites for informal markets. It is also intended to run small business training classes for hawkers. (Cohen, Financial Mail, Oct 25, 1997: 72). It is necessary for municipal by-laws to regulate these informal traders and for designated marketplaces to be provided to accommodate them.

On a cautionary note, ultimately the successful renewal of the inner city depends on an economic upliftment programme rather than on cleaner streets and defeating the criminals. As Richard Tomlinson succinctly put it, *"In a heterogeneous unequal society, public safety and respect for and the maintenance of public spaces and public infrastructure can only come about if there are jobs and if there is social integration."* (Tomlinson 1998:3).

---

[1] Population statistics for Johannesburg are notoriously unreliable. Richard Tomlinson quotes 19 000 or so people living in the central city plus close to a 1 000 homeless. The immediate adjacent residential areas: Joubert Part, Berea, Hillbrow accommodating about another 66 000. (Tomlinson 1998:8)

If the central city is to retain its potential as a major retailing centre it will not only have to manage its streets better but also provide entertainment and other features to lure people from both the northern and southern shopping malls. Richard Tomlinson suggests Johannesburg city centre offers the ideal home for a dynamic African music/entertainment centre. Soweto does not because the northern suburbanites will not go there, and on the other hand neither does Sandton because it is difficult and expensive for those in the south to get there. If there is better security the city centre will offer a point of integration unlike any other site in South Africa. (Tomlinson, Business Day, Feb 25, 1998:14).

The question remains does Detroit symbolize where Johannesburg's future lies ? Among American cities, Detroit has become synonymous with urban blight, its low-income areas imploding amid decay and despair. Mayor Coleman Young showed little concern for residential areas and targeted resources at riverfront developments. Detroit's *Renaissance Centre* office development offered few benefits to the inner city's low income residents. Further punitive taxes and trade union activity did little to attract business investment back to the city. It remains one of America's most racially and economically segregated cities. Rusk equates a segregated city such as Detroit with inner city poverty. *" A high minority population (30 per cent or more), and a significant city-urban income gap (70 per cent or less) seems to define the point of no return for a central city."* (Rusk 1993:45). Given the fact that Johannesburg's inner city is now predominately black, the experience of Detroit would seem to suggest that the future of Johannesburg's inner city is bleak. But the racial equation may not be appropriate for the Johannesburg situation. As Tomlinson points out, poverty in Johannesburg is concentrated not in the inner city but in the vast apartheid townships and squatter camps, south of the city. (Tomlinson 1998:8). Unlike Detroit, a residential location in the inner city offers better access to economic opportunities. Focusing on racial conflict and high crime levels ignores the fact that decentralization in Johannesburg was taking place before crime had become an issue and preceded the demise of apartheid. Although the BIDs are helping to bring crime rates down and to improve the appearance of the streets, visioning initiatives such as Mayivuke failed to see that it may be impossible to reverse existing trends. The inner city of Johannesburg has changed irrevocably and is now essentially an African city. While lessons maybe learnt from the Detroit experience, it is important to view the problems of Johannesburg's inner city from an African perspective.

Tomlinson stresses the importance of incorporating the vast and rapidly growing low income population in Soweto into any development strategy for the city. Traditionally the apartheid townships have lacked jobs and recreational facilities. Due to the conversions of public transportation routes on the city centre, it acts as a centripetal force on black people living on the periphery. He also warns that the elements that make Johannesburg city centre an African city are the same elements that are perceived to be its problems. As this is not necessarily the case it is imperative that we find value in what is African about the city. *"The underlying principle is to respect the context and to believe that there is commercial value in the city's being an African city. Further, it is to believe that the failure to discover investment opportunities arising from, and benefiting, those who use the city centre will lead to the city's ultimate collapse."* (Tomlinson, Business Day, Feb 25, 1998: 14).

In contrast to Detroit, which has experienced devastating depopulation, one of the most pressing concerns in Johannesburg is to revitalize housing for the increasing number of people seeking to live in the inner city. The past 40 years have seen extreme swings of attitudes and ideas as regards building for the masses. From the huge and dehumanizing high rise blocks of the late 1950s and early 1960s the fashion is now for smaller, lower and more varied schemes,

with the specific needs of the community kept firmly in mind. The low rise residential portion of Berea is more in keeping with modern ideas of quality living. The Pompeii (1953) which is three stories high, at the corner of York and High Streets and was designed by Michael Gluchman and Rich de Beer is a more attractive statement of residential town architecture. *"Pompeii ... shows not only how a whole neighbourhood can be established, but how a genuine vernacular architecture, based on particulars, can be formed out of the Modern Movement matrix, by solving local problems elegantly."* (Chipkin 1993:242). Dewar points out in order to create qualities of "city" as opposed to suburbia a certain level of density is necessary, *"The critical issue in this regard is not maximum densities but the achievement of minimum densities sufficient to support public transportation and basic services within a range defined by movement on foot. This restriction offers more not less freedom."* (Dewar et al, 1991:47). The original Le Corbusier style high rise developments have become some of the worst slum areas in the world's poorer cities. One compromise may be to demolish the top floors in order to bring the buildings down to a more human scale. In some cases, where the deterioration is too advanced for renewal, the building will have to be demolished, enabling the creation of much needed inner city parks and sports fields.

However, urban housing projects have little long term prospects of success, unless the people who live in the houses, are able to find work. Thus the most important urban planning strategy is to promote urban economic development. With the unemployment figure for Gauteng standing at 28.2%. (Census 1996 quoted in Steinburg, Business day, Oct 21, 1998:2). there is little sense in relying on national economic policy alone to transform the situation. The traditional urban economic development approach has assumed that development is best left to the private sector and that benefits trickle down in the form of jobs and improved services made possible by higher taxes. But in South Africa it is now apparent that the urban poor will have to wait a long time if they are to rely on the trickle down approach. In a city like Johannesburg where there are high levels of poverty and unemployment, the formal economic sector is simply unable to absorb all the new entrants into the job market. Therefore, a vast number of people will have to seek survival through self-employment usually in the so called "informal sector". Finding places to manufacture, trade, and to provide services at very low costs within the urban area is of vital importance. The compactness of the Johannesburg city centre with its plentiful supply of cheap office space and empty warehouses is ideally suited to promoting small and medium black manufacturing enterprises. These businesses face many obstacles especially lack of access to capital and technical skills. But workshops could be set up for training people in basic business and technical skills. It may be necessary to accept that leading businesses have essentially left the central city and are unlikely to return and that the current decline of property values are unlikely to be reversed. Therefore an effective development plan will focus mainly on opportunities for small, medium and informal businesses at the same time promoting job creation.

Ultimately the success of the new democratic South Africa will to a large degree depend on efficient and prosperous cities. Tomlinson warns that, *"To anticipate the turnaround seen in American inner cities misses the conditions prevailing in those cities: focused public sectors and private sectors united behind strong leadership and considerable public subsidy." None of these conditions currently applies in Johannesburg."* (Tomlinson 1998: 1). Solutions to Johannesburg's urban problems will cost money. It is inevitable that a developing country such as South Africa will be caught between ever higher expectations and ever more limited resources. The Central Government in contrast to the American Federal Government is unlikely to have surplus funds available to subsidize significant urban development. The introduction of metropolitan government for Greater Johannesburg will mean a more equitable

allocation of money to the inner city. But Johannesburg's public resources will never be enough to deal with all its social problems. The most powerful social programmes: jobs, income, wealth are largely derived from the private sector and not government. Therefore planning for urban economic development will depend to a large degree on urban coalitions between the private sector, metropolitan government and local communities. Strong city leadership is important and the focus should be on development programmes which reach into poor neighbourhoods particularly in the inner city. If Johannesburg central city is not to become a wasteland it is vitally important that an appropriate urban policy is directed not only at ensuring that people have adequate housing but also at encouraging poor people to participate in the economic mainstream of urban life.

# 5 Bibliography:


'AMERICA'S cities' 1998. *The Economist* Jan 10: 15-18

BERNSTEIN,A. 1998. 'Proposals threaten services' *Business Day.* June 2.

BRADBURY,K.L.et al 1982. *Urban Decline.* Washington D.C. The Brookings institution.

CANTOR,G. 1997 'The Detroit mayor's race: unbought, unbossed, unfunded.' *Detroit News.* June 29.

CHALMERS,R 1998. 'Housing to play integral role in shaping the country's cities'. *Business Day.* Feb 5:12.

CHIPKIN,C. 1993. *Johannesburg style.* Cape Town: Davis Philip.

COHEN,M. 1997 'Street traders: City markets, plan mooted'. *Financial Mail.* Oct 24:72.

COHEN,M.1997. 'Banking: to move or not to move out ?' *Financial Mail.* Nov 14:73

DOWNS,A . 1994. *New visions for metropolitan America.* Wastionton,D.C: Brookings Institution.

DEWAR,D and R.S.Uytenbogaardt. 1991. *South African cities: a manifesto for change.* Cape Town: Univ. of Cape Town.

ENSLIN,S. 1998. 'A-grade vacancies in major centres ease'. *Business Day.* Mar 25.

FIFE,I.1997. 'Suburban decay: Hilbrow is the beachhead.' *Financial Mail.* Oct 24:72

FIFE,I. 1997. 'Johannesburg CBD offices: light at the end of the tunnel.' *Financial Mail.* Nov 21 .

GALSTER,G. ed 1992. *The metropolis in black and white.* New Jersey: State Univ of New Jersey

GARREAU,J. 1991. *Edge City.* New York: Double Day.

GARVIN,A. 1995. *The American city.* New York: McGrow – Hill.

GOLDBERG,A. 1997 'Schools in the cities: Metcalf leads the way'. *Financial Mail.* Feb 07.

GOLDBERG,A 1997 'Office conversions: new hope for homeless workers'. *Financial Mail.* Oct 24.

GOLDBERG,A 1997 'Urban Renewal: from office to appartment'. *Financial Mail.* Aug 1.

GOLDBERG,A 1998. Crackdowns targets landlords, tenants. *Financial Mail.* Feb 13 : 66.

'JOHANNESBURG CBD: On a knife edge'. 1996. *Financial Mail.* April 26.

JOHNSON,P 1997. *A history of the American people.* London: Weidnfeld and Nicolson.

JOHNSON,P,1983. *A history of the modern world.* London: Weidnfeld and Nicolson.

HELLMAN,L. 1988. *Architecture for beginners.* New York: Writers and readers pub.

McKELVEY,B. 1968. *The emergence of metropolitan America.* 1915-1966. Rutgers Univ. press.

MAKONI,J. 199[illegible] Bid to change CBD's image with new informal trading laws'. *Saturday Star.* Mar 13.

MANDELA,N. 1994. *Long Walk to freedom.* London: Abacus.

MBEKI, T. 1998. 'Africa is a rebel with a cause' *Business Day.* Aug 14.

MNYANDA,L. 1997. 'Sanlam puts a freeze on city centre investment' *Business Day.* April 16.

MNYANDA,L. 1997. 'Decline of CBD could ruin finances of Johannesburg' *Business Day.* Jul 30.

MNYANDA,L. 1998. 'Joburg's CBD needs more than words.' *Business Day.* Feb 18.

NATHAN,J. 1996. 'Comment: chartered schools help to improve education. *Detroit News.* Nov 17.

PAKENHAM. T. 1979. *The Boer War.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

PEPPER,J. 1996. 'Power elite design a new downtown'. *Detroit News.* Mar 10.

PEPPER,J. 1997. 'The road to renaissance'. *Detroit News.* May 4.

PEPPER,J. 1997. 'Detroit slow to embrace privatization'. *Detroit News.* Jul 27

PEPPER,J. 1997. 'Detroit lack of usable land deters business'. *Detroit News.* Aug 25

PEPPER,J. 1997. 'Red tape stands in the way of Detroit development'. *Detroit News.* Sept 10.

PEPPER,J. 1997. 'The road to renaissance, final installment: time for Archer to deliver on promises of first term'. *Detroit News.* Nov 9.

RENEWAL AND REVENUE REPORT. City of Detroit, 1962

REYNOLDS,P. 1998. 'The pros and cons of packing for those greener pastures.' *Sunday Times Metro.* Mar 8:11

RICHBURG,K. 1997. *Out of Africa.* New York: Basic books.

RUSK, D.1993. *Cities without suburbs.* Washington: Woodrow Wilson.

RUSSEL,C. 1998. 'Draft bill nudges megacity proposal closer to reality. *Star* May 25:2.

SILVERMAN,M. 1996. *Living on the edge.* Johannesburg: Univ. of the Witwatersrand.

SMITH,D ed. 1992. *The apartheid city and beyond.* London: Routledge.

STEINBURG, J. 1998. 'More than half of S.A's black women are unemployed.' *Business Day.* Oct 21.

TOMLINSON,R. 1994. *Urban planning development.* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand Univ. press.

TOMLINSON, R. 1998. *From exclusion to inclusion: rethinking Johannesburg's central city.* Johannesburg: Graduate school of public and development management. Univ. of the Witwatersrand.

TOMLINSON, R. 1998. *From exclusion to inclusion: the Johannesburg inner city in 2010.* Unpublished mimeo.

TOMLINSON,R. 1998. There is commercial value in Jo'burg being an African city. *Business Day.* Feb 25:14.

'TURN UP THE LIGHTS: a survey of cities'. 1995. *The Economist.* Jul 29.

URBAN FOUNDATION. *Policies for a new urban future.* Urban Debate 2010.

VERSTER,B. 1997. 'Huge costs involved in converting inner-city buildings.' *Project pro* Nov:29

WILLING,R and V,Toy. 1997. 'Coleman Young dead at 79.' *Detroit News* Aug 26.

WINKLER,T. 1995. *Restructuring suburbia.* Johannesburg: Univ. of the Witwatersrand.

WORLD BOOK ENCYCLOPEDIA 1980. Chicargo: World Book – Childcraft international, Inc.

'WRONG SIGNAL'. 1998. *Business Day.* Jan 19.

**Author** Stainer D C
**Name of thesis** A Tale Of Two Cities. A Comparison Between The Detroit And Johannesburg Urban Experience Stainer D C 1999

***PUBLISHER:***
**University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg**
**©2013**

***LEGAL NOTICES:***

**Copyright Notice:** All materials on the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg Library website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the Library website.