



# Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Detroit: The Chaldean Community and Their Rise to Majority Ownership in the Grocery Markets, 1943-1990

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Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Detroit: The Chaldean Community and Their Rise to  
Majority Ownership in the Grocery Markets, 1943-1990

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for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the changing demographics of store ownership in the city of Detroit from 1943-1990 and explains how a small immigrant community from Iraq; the Chaldeans, rose to control 90% of the grocery markets. The Chaldeans began immigrating to the United States in the early 20th century primarily because of economic opportunity and political instability in the Middle East. United States Immigration law kept the community small until restrictions were relaxed in 1965. During these years, Detroit was undergoing a race-relations-crisis, culminating in years of unrest and two major riots that required the use of federal troops to intervene. In the meantime, political instability in the Middle East and the growing option of immigrating to the United States led to widespread immigration in the Chaldean community, primarily to the city of Detroit. I trace the progress of Chaldean store ownership and the changing demographics of business-owners using secondary sources concerning race-relations, business environment, sociological research on the Chaldean community, and primary source from: The *Detroit Free Press*, Jewish and Chaldean publications, interviews, and business directories. I conclude that Chaldean store ownership in the grocery markets reached 90% by 1990 due to deteriorating race-relations, unstable business environments, earlier immigrant communities leaving the occupation with better opportunities, and the development of an ethnic-occupation that led to the Chaldean community creating systems to help encourage and expand ownership in the grocery markets.

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## I.

### Introduction

In 20<sup>th</sup>-century Detroit, the Chaldean community emerged as the most dominant ethnic group in the grocery market business. In the beginning of the century, there were only two markets owned by Chaldeans, with the majority of stores being owned by the Jewish, Syrian and Lebanese population. As riots and racial tension unfolded in Detroit, the ethnic landscape began to change in the city limits, with much of the population moving out into the suburbs. As a response to civil unrest, unstable racial relations and lack of government intervention to help small-business owners, many of these stores were bought out by the Chaldean community. The Chaldeans, a conservative Eastern Catholic community mostly from Iraq, began large-scale immigration from Iraq to the United States, in response to several factors, the most important being economic opportunity and an already established community in metropolitan-Detroit. The transition in Iraq at the time was also uncertain, with several revolutions that saw the nation change from a monarchical, to socialist, to pan-Arab government. In addition, the United States passed the 1965 Immigration Law that favored large-scale immigration from countries such as Iraq, that had not previously sent many immigrants to the US. Inviting immigration laws, coinciding with two major riots in Detroit, in 1943 and 1967 respectively, allowed for store ownership to change dramatically. As early as the 1967 riots, the Chaldean community already had a large share of grocery stores in Detroit,



however by 1990 the number was well over 1,000. By 1990, there was not a single Jewish owned grocery store in Detroit city limits.

In this thesis, I will investigate the following questions: What factors played a role in this large-scale change of grocery-store ownership? How did the 1943 riots influence this change? How did the 1967 riots influence this change? What were race relations like before Chaldeans became the majority owner in Detroit? Why did Chaldeans heavily invest in the grocery business? What drove Jewish and other ethnic groups out? What role, if any, did the government play in this change of composition?

My hypothesis is that a variety of factors played a role in the change of ethnic ownership in the grocery-store business. The Chaldean community was heavily involved in the grocery-store business in Iraq, as it was illegal for Muslims to sell alcohol. Thus, it was a natural occupation for the community to get involved in, especially with the lack of fluent English speakers in the community to get other jobs in the workforce. In addition, opportunities in the automotive industry dwindled due to the decline of manufacturing while immigration laws changed in 1965, allowing for more immigration from Asia (including Iraq). With deteriorating race relations over the years between Jews, Whites, and Blacks, incoming Chaldeans acted as a middleman minority and took advantage of a chance to buy and start their own grocery businesses from those who were willing to sell businesses and property for extremely low prices and leave Detroit for the suburbs.

To test my argument, I will analyze race-relations and business-ownership during the years 1943-1990. This includes analysis of the first major riots, the 1943 riots, and the effects on small-businesses and race-relations. This will also include analysis of race-relations and business activity leading up the 1967, the next major riot that destroyed

over 2700 businesses and contributed heavily to large chain stores, businesses and citizens leaving for the suburbs. Testimony from grocery-market owners will be reviewed during these years and post-1967 riots, involving the source material from other forms of testimonial support that may arise from local newspapers such as the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Detroit News*, the *Detroit Jewish News*, the *Jewish Chronicle*, and the *Chaldean News*. Past interviews with former store owners will also be reviewed and integrated into the research project.

The significance of my research is that it will help build a proper historical chronology for the present-day change in ethnic-ownership of grocery-markets inside the city of Detroit. The research will help build a foundation for this part of business history related to the city of Detroit and provide an explanation for how race-relations play a role in changing business demographics.

## II.

### Definition of Terms

*Chaldean*: a person who is a member of the eastern-rite Catholic denomination from Iraq; in metropolitan-Detroit and other parts of the world, the word is used as a label for an ethnic group, however to other branches of Syriac Christianity, Chaldeans are known as being members of the Assyrian ethnic group who are in communion with the Catholic Church.

*Chaldean-American*: a Chaldean who is also an American citizen or born inside the United States, also considered a “first-generation American.”

*Grocer*: a person who owns or operates a grocery store/market

*Grocery store*: Grocery markets are stores that sell perishable goods, including fruits and vegetables, but also usually having beer, wine and liquor in inventory. They differ in other types of stores due to size, some are very large and some are small enough to be considered a convenience store; the size of a 7-11 or Tedeschi’s.

*Liquor store*: Liquor stores have a liquor license and the legally have the right to sell liquor, in addition to selling tobacco, and providing other products such as beer, wine, perishable goods, and possibly having a deli and meat selection. Some liquor stores may also sell clothes and phone accessories. These stores are generally small and considered “convenience stores.”

*Grocery Market*: In this research paper, the term “grocery market” will in some parts, collectively refer to both “grocery store” and “liquor store” as some statistics, such as

those from food distribution centers, do not differentiate between a “liquor store” and “grocery store” as they both sell food products.

*1943 Race Riots:* Riots that took place in the city of Detroit that were influenced by race conflicts, involving federal troops to restore peace to the city. In relation to small businesses, many properties were destroyed and relations were strained between white and black people.

*1967 Riots:* Riots that took place in the city of Detroit in which race relations were a major contribution, involving federal troops to restore peace to the city. Over 2700 businesses were destroyed during these riots. The 1967 Riots are cited by most historians for being the reason behind “white-flight” and “black middle-class flight” into the suburbs that continues to the present-day.

### III.

#### Who Are the Chaldeans?

A historical overview with a detailed chronology of the Chaldean people has been the subject of contentious debate for decades. In the communities that presently remain in Iraq and the diaspora, the history has yet to be agreed on.<sup>1</sup> In one perspective, Chaldeans originated from the Babylonian Empire. Another perspective believes that the Chaldeans are actually ethnically Assyrian, but assumed an ethno-religious identity because of a communion with the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> Since the former view is more prominently accepted amongst the Chaldean community in metropolitan-Detroit, it is outside the scope of this research paper to revisit the historical argument.<sup>3</sup> Instead, I provide a brief introduction of the Chaldean culture and traditions, as well describing the Chaldean journey that began in Iraq and settled in metropolitan-Detroit.

The Chaldeans who settled in metropolitan-Detroit are an ethno-religious group that originated in modern-day Iraq, around surrounding areas of Mosul, primarily from the village of Telkaif.<sup>4</sup> Their ancestral language is Aramaic (commonly called “Sureth” and “Chaldean” in the community, sometimes referred to as “Syriac,” “Assyrian,” or

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<sup>1</sup> Bülent Özdemir, *Assyrian Identity and the Great War: Nestorian, Chaldean and Syrian Christians in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Dunbeath, Caithness, Scotland: Whittles Publishing, 2012), 2; Mary C. Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan*, 24-25; Yasmeen Hanoosh, “Tomorrow They Write Their Story: Chaldeans in America and the Transforming Narrative of Identities,” in *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, ed. Layla Al Maleh (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2009), 396.

<sup>3</sup> Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. Telkaif is the name of the city in Arabic. In Syriac it is called “TelKeppe” and sometimes written in two separate words (Tel Keppe).

“Chaldean Neo-Aramaic” academically) and are religiously Chaldean-Catholic, an Eastern-rite Catholic Church that maintains the original liturgy and traditions of the Church of the East while also adhering to Canon Law and the recognition of the Pope as the spiritual leader of the unified Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup> Because the mother tongue of the Chaldeans pre-dates Arabic, Chaldeans are considered to be a pre-Arab Semitic group with indigenous roots in modern-day Iraq.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the majority of the Chaldean community vigorously opposes being grouped into the Arab ethnic group, and this collective thought is expressed through the naming of various organizations (such as the “Arab-American and Chaldean Council” and “Arab and Chaldean Festival,” both located in the city of Detroit) and interviews with community leaders.<sup>7</sup>

The role of religion in forging the Chaldean and other Middle-Eastern identities has its origins in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>8</sup> The Ottoman Empire governed their citizenry based on the millet system, which divided citizens into Muslim and minority-religious groups. The Chaldean religious designation was one of the accepted minority-religious groups (along with other Catholic and Orthodox faiths) that created an autonomous jurisdiction within the Empire.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the leadership of the Chaldean community were in its clergy, who were able to continue performing religious duties in the Chaldean

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<sup>5</sup> Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan*, 24-25.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph and Natalie Henrich, *Why Humans Cooperate: A Cultural and Evolutionary Explanation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 75.

<sup>7</sup> Mary C. Sengstock, *Chaldean Americans: Changing Conceptions of Ethnic Identity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1999), 163.

<sup>8</sup> Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “Maintaining the Faith of the Fathers: Dilemmas of Religious Identity in the Christian and Muslim Arab-American Communities,” in *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, ed. Ernest McCarus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 65.

<sup>9</sup> Haddad, “Maintaining the Faith,” 66.

ancestral language of Aramaic. This created a tight-knit community, which was able to carry on its customs and heritage following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, into the present-day country of Iraq.

Chaldean's in Telkaif and nearby villages continued their close-ties with the church and religious freedom in the successor of the Ottoman Empire. The Kingdom of Iraq – established in 1921 by the British Empire – developed a constitution that favored Islam as the state religion and Arabic as the official language, while also guaranteeing equality regardless of religion, language, and nationality.<sup>10</sup> This allowed the continuation of representing the Chaldeans through the hierarchy of the Chaldean Catholic Church. The government of the Kingdom of Iraq was a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliamentary system, and the king was responsible for appointing the representative of the minority groups to the senate.<sup>11</sup> The appointed senates representing the Chaldean people during these years were also the patriarchs of the Chaldean Catholic Church: Yousef VI Emmanuel II Thomas until his death in 1947 and Yousef VII Ghanima until his death – concurrent with the overthrow of the monarchy – in 1958.<sup>12</sup> The See of the Chaldean Catholic Church was located in nearby Alqosh, another Chaldean village north of Telkaif. However, nationalistic minorities were brutalized, especially with massacres against the Kurdish and Assyrian/Chaldean populations closer to the border of Turkey.

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Yacoub, “How Does the Arab World Perceive Multiculturalism and Treat its Minorities? The Assyro-Chaldeans of Iraq as a Case Study,” in *Multiculturalism and Minority Rights in the Arab World*, ed. Will Kymlicka and Eva Pföstl, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 17, accessed December 2, 2016, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199675135.003.0011.

<sup>11</sup> Yacoub, “Treat its Minorities,” 18.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Political instability followed the creation of the Republic of Iraq in 1958. From 1958 to 1968, there were a total of four coups along with constant civil unrest and uprisings. Politically motivated alliances were the culprit, along with ideologies that supported brute force as a means to an end. The Iraqi Republic that lasted a decade aligned with a mostly Communist ideology, conflicting with the heavily Arab-nationalism and one-party socialist state that the Ba'ath Party aimed to create.

During these years of political strife, the Chaldeans were not subject to ill-treatment, unless they were involved politically, like any other group. Most of the Chaldean families in the villages were involved in agriculture, where they grew crops and raised livestock for consumption and sales in the market.<sup>13</sup> Other Chaldeans left the villages to go to the cities for more opportunity, mainly the cities of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul-proper. According to the constitution (since the Kingdom of Iraq), Muslims were not allowed to sell or produce alcohol, creating a lucrative opportunity for Chaldeans and other Christians. This led to many Chaldeans getting involved in markets that involved the sale and consumption of alcohol, such as stores and hotels.<sup>14</sup>

By this time, Chaldeans were already leaving Iraq, but the numbers increased rapidly after the Ba'ath Party began their rule in 1968. Iraq would continue to be devastated by wars and political infighting, which was also happening in neighboring Arab countries. The reality of instability with a radical ideology drove Chaldeans away from their homeland for peace and economic opportunity, mainly in the United States.

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<sup>13</sup> Henrich, *Why Humans Cooperate*, 80.

<sup>14</sup> Gary C. David, "Behind the Bulletproof Glass: Iraqi Chaldean Store Ownership in Metropolitan Detroit," in *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream*, ed. Nabeel Abraham & Andrew Shryock (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 159.



These events, along with progressive immigration laws in the United States and a healthy economy, convinced many to cross the Atlantic Ocean to chase the “American Dream.”

Due to the Chaldean-Catholic religious affiliation, the Chaldean community is heavily connected to the church. The Chaldean Catholic Church acts as the social and political cohesion for the community, and is widely regarded as the primary reason for the longevity of the Chaldean culture. Aramaic is still used in the liturgy, especially important when Iraq underwent a strict pan-Arabian movement that put emphasis on the Arabic language. Chaldeans would still go to church and have mass in Aramaic, as well as the customs associated with Catholicism (such as attending Catechism and the Communion, both of which are learned using Aramaic.) The church defines the Chaldean community as an ethno-religious group and also protects their heritage, as the ancestral languages of the Middle East (pre-Arabic) are mostly limited to minority religions. This strong relationship to the church – stemming hundreds of years – is especially important to the Chaldeans who claim indigenous roots in Iraq and wish to maintain their identity in the United States.

The first Chaldeans to arrive in the Detroit area immigrated in the early 1900s. The advent of the automotive industry drew the attention of many all over the world, and working in the factories offered a living wage for anybody willing to put in the hours. Industrial jobs grew heavily and the population of Detroit increased rapidly, consistently remaining in the top ten most populated cities in the United States for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reaching a peak of nearly two million in the middle of the century. Demand was so high in this industry that the wages were some of the highest in the country while the educational requirements were low. Many employees in the automotive and manufacturing factories did not even speak English that well, which was especially

Figure 1. Excerpt from the Detroit City Directory.

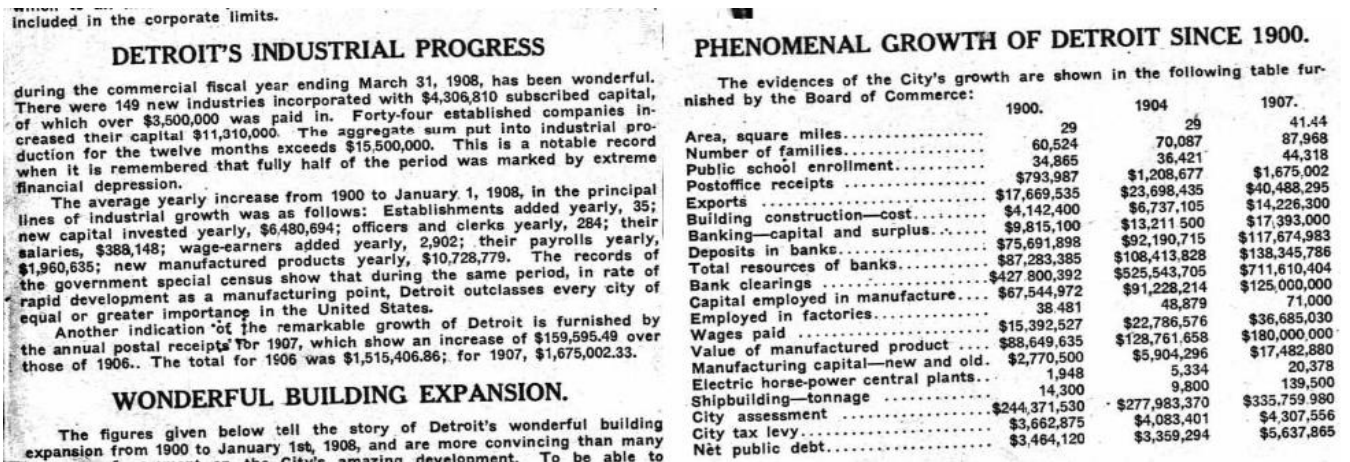


Figure 1. The author of this writing ecstatically shares the growth and prosperity of Detroit, in the introductory pages of the 1908 Detroit City Directory. Taken from "U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995," indexed database and digital images, Ancestry.com (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 2 December 2016), pages 8-9, citing "Detroit, Michigan, City Directory, 1908 (Detroit, MI.:n.p., 1908)."

attractive to potential immigrants.

However, these opportunities were not readily available to any immigrant. At the time, the United States had restrictions on the origin of immigrants, and enacted even more restrictions in 1925. The Immigration Act of 1925, in addition to the National

Origins Act and Asian Exclusion Act, established a quota system that severely limited the amount of immigrants born in Middle Eastern and Asian countries. This resulted in the total percentage of immigrants arriving from Asia and the Middle East to around 3% until the 1960s.<sup>15</sup> Most of the immigrants during these years were primarily from Europe, although the Act also restricted those from Southern and Eastern Europe significantly.<sup>16</sup> By 1925, there was already a sizeable Polish community that was heavily employed in the automotive industry, while the small amount of Middle Eastern people was mostly involved in operating convenience stores or peddling.

Decade	Region of origin (%)						
	Total (N in 1000s)	North & Western Europe	South & Eastern Europe	Canada	Total Europe & Canada	Latin America & Caribbean	Asia & Middle East
1841 – 50	1,713	93.0	0.3	2.4	95.7	1.2	0.0

<sup>15</sup> See Table 1. Taken from Pyong Gap Min & Mehdi Bozorgmehr, “United States: The Entrepreneurial Cutting Edge,” in *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Venturing Abroad in the Age of Globalization*, ed. Robert Kloosterman and Jan Rath (Oxford : Berg, 2003), 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

1851 – 60	2,598	93.6	0.8	2.3	96.7	0.6	1.6
1861 – 70	2,315	87.8	1.5	6.7	96.0	0.6	2.8
1871 – 80	2,812	73.6	7.7	13.6	94.9	0.7	4.4
1881 – 90	5,247	72.0	18.2	7.5	97.7	0.7	1.3
1891 – 00	3,688	44.6	51.9	0.1	96.6	1.0	2.0
1901 – 10	8,795	21.7	69.9	2.0	93.6	2.1	3.7
1911 – 20	5,736	25.3	50.0	12.9	88.2	6.0	4.3
1921 – 30	4,107	32.5	27.5	22.2	82.2	14.4	2.7
1931 – 40	528	38.7	27.2	20.5	86.4	9.7	3.0
1941 – 50	1,035	49.9	10.1	16.6	76.6	17.7	3.1
1951 – 60	2,516	38.2	14.5	15.0	67.7	24.6	6.1
1961 – 70	3,322	18.3	15.5	12.4	46.2	39.3	12.9
1971 – 80	4,493	11.6	10.0	23.8	45.4	40.3	35.3
1981 – 90	7,338	4.6	5.2	1.8	11.6	46.8	38.0
1991 – 2000	9,095	4.5	10.5	2.1	17.1	47.2	30.7

Table 1. Immigration to the United States by decade and region of origin, 1841-1996. Taken from Pyong Gap Min & Mehdi Bozorgmehr, “United States: The Entrepreneurial Cutting Edge,” in *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Venturing Abroad in the Age of Globalization*, ed. Robert Kloosterman & Jan Rath (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2003), 19.

Regardless of the restrictions in place, the Chaldean community would eventually develop with help from pioneering Middle Eastern communities. The earliest Middle Easterners to establish themselves in Detroit were the Syrian-Lebanese, people who were mostly from within the borders of modern-day Lebanon. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, both the capitals of Damascus and Beirut were within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, called “Ottoman Syria,” and immigrants from these areas were considered to simply be “Syrian” in the U.S. Census.<sup>17</sup> One of the ways the Syrians made a living was by owning their own business, mostly in the realm of selling groceries. For the years of 1908-1909, a directory of Syrian businesses across the United States was published, called *The Syrian Business Directory*. According to the Directory, four grocery stores, one dry goods store

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<sup>17</sup> Alixa Naff, “The Early Arab Immigrant Experience,” in *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, ed. Ernest McCarus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 24-25.

that sold groceries, two fruit stores, one of which sold candy, and six other businesses were owned by Syrians. Publication of the Directory seized in subsequent years, but it reveals that throughout the country in 1908-1909, at least 1/3 of Syrian business-owners were involved in groceries, including over half of their total stores in Detroit.<sup>18</sup>

The relationship with the Syrians was not simply due to sharing a similar Middle-Eastern background. This Syrian-Lebanese community was composed of mostly adherents of the Maronite Church. The Maronite Church is similar to the Chaldean Catholic Church in many ways, in that they are in communion with the Catholic Church in Rome, while also maintaining their traditions. More importantly, their liturgy is in Syriac and mass is in Arabic instead of Latin. This was very important to early Chaldeans, who were not familiar with the Latin Rite Catholic churches in Detroit, many that catered to various European communities, including the Italians, Irish and Poles.<sup>19</sup> As the church has always played an important role in social cohesion, attending mass at the Maronite Church allowed Chaldeans to get involved with the Syrians in social and business gatherings. With only approximately 120 Chaldeans during the 1930s, they were essentially part of the Syrian community and used the St. Maron Maronite Catholic Church – established in 1915 – for various Catholic sacraments and functions, including marriages, communions, and funerals.<sup>20</sup> The Syrians helped the Chaldeans become acquainted to the occupation and the markets, and eventually assisted them in getting

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<sup>18</sup> *The Syrian Business Directory First Edition, 1908-1909*. Accessed 2 December 2016, <https://lebanesestudies.news.chass.ncsu.edu/2015/02/27/syrian-american-business-directory-project-1908-1909/>

<sup>19</sup> Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

started in the grocery business. Some of the Syrians even sold their businesses to the Chaldeans as they pursued other interests and became involved in other professions.<sup>21</sup>

The assistance from the Syrian-Lebanese community was an important factor in contributing to the future of Chaldean immigration and occupation in metropolitan-Detroit. Chaldeans continued to seek immigration to Detroit whenever possible, regardless of the lack of opportunity in the automotive industry. Already existing Chaldeans continued to grow their families, choosing the city of Detroit as their settlement. Later in 1948, following the end of World War II and the growth of the Chaldean community to around one-thousand people, the first Chaldean Catholic Church was finally constructed inside the city of Detroit (and only second in the United States at the time), officially called the Mother of God Chaldean Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup>

#### IV.

#### 1943 Detroit Race Riots and Jewish Merchants

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<sup>21</sup> David, "Behind the Bulletproof Glass," 152.

<sup>22</sup> Jacob Bacall, *Chaldeans in Detroit* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 24.

The 1943 Detroit Race Riots drastically changed the status of race relations, however, they were not the first occurrence of anti-Semitism and racism against African-Americans in Detroit. For many years prior to the riots that destroyed a significant section of commercial and residential property, Blacks and Jews both held prejudices against each other and dealt with prejudices as minority communities.<sup>23</sup> Blacks, in general, were still not treated as equal citizens. While many were able to escape the strongly enforced Jim Crow laws that plagued the southern United States by settling in Detroit, their new home did not prevent various unfair practices against the Black community, including housing conditions, fair bank loans, and improper integration. Many Blacks lived in Detroit alleys before the 1920s, because of exorbitant rent prices in poor ghettos.<sup>24</sup> These areas were overcrowded, unsanitary, and lacked resources that many others living in the city enjoyed. In many places, there were still separate facilities for White and Black people. Separate housing facilities were strongly enforced because of racism, and businesses that were not friendly to Black consumers.<sup>25</sup>

The Jewish community also dealt with rampant anti-Semitism, especially from prominent leaders in Detroit. Some examples include interactions from the Ku Klux Klan and Henry Ford, who created a pamphlet that was anti-Semitic in nature and promoted the idea that the Russian Jews who entered Detroit were there to spread Communism.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., "Black-Jewish Relations in Wartime Detroit: The Marsh, Loving, Wolf Surveys and the Race Riot of 1943," *Jewish Social Studies* 47, no. 3-4 (Summer-Fall 1985): 221.

<sup>24</sup> Capeci, "Black-Jewish Relations," 223.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Walzer, "East European Jewish Detroit in the Early Twentieth Century," *Judaism* 49, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 298.

Even a prominent Detroit-area Catholic priest by the name of Charles Edward Coughlin did not spare the Jewish community from being a target. Coughlin grew to prominence in the late 1920s-1930s through the use of radio, attracting up to 30 million listeners per week.<sup>27</sup> He controversially supported Adolf Hitler, American isolationism in World War II, and anti-Semitism through his radio shows and sermons.<sup>28</sup> For Coughlin, the reality of the Great Depression, Communism, and global conflict was due to money-hungry Jewish financiers, a conspiracy that resonated with many Americans, contributing to increased tensions against Jews nationwide.<sup>29</sup> Jewish traditions of being self-reliant through self-employment and maintaining a strong religious community allowed them to live more comfortably amongst each other, and was a necessary lifestyle due to the nature of anti-Semitism at the time.

While the Jewish and Black communities constantly dealt with racism and prejudice tendencies, they also lived near each other. Most of the Jewish community lived in a neighborhood that anchors the Detroit city center and Detroit river. The Blacks also lived nearby, and virtually all of the store-fronts on Hastings Street, the main commercial thoroughfare of the Paradise Valley neighborhood, were run by Jews. If a Black person wanted to shop for groceries, meat, and most services, they were likely paying a Jewish merchant.<sup>30</sup> The Jewish community held lots of property and enjoyed plenty of success due to economic prosperity. They had strong institutions and

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<sup>27</sup> Sheldon Marcus, *Father Coughlin: The Tumultuous Life of the Priest of the Little Flower* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>30</sup> Capeci, "Black-Jewish Relations," 222.



established themselves early in Detroit's history, beginning in the late 19th century.<sup>31</sup> By 1920, a survey reported that around a third of the Jewish population in Detroit owned property or ran a business, and an additional third were involved in sales, clerkship and peddling, while less than a third were labor workers or artisans.<sup>32</sup> Understanding that the anti-Semitism carried on from Europe meant that they had less opportunities in employment in Detroit, leading them to seek self-employment instead of working in the automotive industry.<sup>33</sup> This promoted high levels of literacy, education, and cultural continuity. The Black community however, did not have the same opportunities to create generational wealth and educational prowess. They spent their money in stores owned by Jewish merchants, sometimes paid their rent to properties owned by Jewish landlords, and sometimes relied on the Jewish community for employment.

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<sup>31</sup> Walzer, "East European Jewish Detroit," 296.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.



Figure 2. Location of the Hastings Street neighborhood near the Detroit River that was devastated by the 1943 Riots. “Overview of Jewish neighborhoods, synagogues, and landmarks in Detroit.” Map created by Patricia Becker and Douglas Towns; Taken from Lila Corwin Berman, “Locating and Relocating the Jewish Neighborhoods of Detroit,” in *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit*, 21.

From the perspective of some Blacks, it was increasingly frustrating to see a successful immigrant community that had a smaller population. Economic hardship was not entirely part of the Jewish experience in Detroit, but for Blacks, it was their primary experience. With the unfair system and practices in place, there were not many opportunities for Blacks to move up in social classes and create a better quality of life. When important economic sectors held prejudice employment practices - such as the

early automotive industry and their reluctance to hire non-Whites, including Black and Jewish people - it mostly affected the Black, not the Jewish community.

Unfortunately, movements in Black Nationalism negatively stereotyped Jews as an answer for income inequality between Jews and Blacks. The idea of the Jew, who was only interested in profiting off the expense of the Black community and their Black employees, was spread throughout Detroit. Jews were understood as profiteers only, regardless of the various social causes the Jews were involved in to help those in need.<sup>34</sup> In many cases, this instigated severe problems. At the advent of World War II, serious racial violence flared between the two communities, resulting in many scenarios of destroyed store-fronts and attacked merchants between 1938 and 1941.<sup>35</sup>

Problems for the Black community only became worse during the beginning of World War II. The population of the city of Detroit continued to grow heavily, mainly as a center of manufacturing to support the war effort, a pattern that began in the beginning of the 20th century. With an abundance of Whites and Blacks arriving from the South and both hoping for the same opportunities, conflict arose. Additionally, many Whites did not necessarily arrive in Detroit with an economic or educational advantage, and they lived in the same ghettos as the Black community. However, the Whites were likely to gain employment and move out of the ghettos, while the struggles for the Black community continued into 1943, leading many to view Jews and Whites alike, as oppressors.

In an effort to address the housing problem for the Black population of Detroit, the federal government got involved and designated a plot of land to be redeveloped

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<sup>34</sup> Capeci, "Black-Jewish Relations," 224.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

towards the outskirts of the city limits. The Sojourner Truth Project was originally meant for Black residents involved in the war effort as defense workers, however, the location prompted protests from the Whites who lived in the area. Although there was a sizable number of Black residents living near the newly designated housing project, the location was far from the Hastings neighborhood near the Detroit River; the center of Black culture and where most of the Black population lived at the time. At first, the White locals in the area protested in abundance, involving a congressman, pastor, and respected local activist against integration. When the police arrived and viewed violence among the racial groups, only a few Whites and over two hundreds Blacks were arrested.

Eventually, the National Guard got involved with a heavy police presence to assist Blacks moving into the housing project. In April of 1942, at least 1,600 Michigan National Guard members and 1,100 Detroit police officers mobilized around the Sojourner Truth Housing Project, protecting Black families as they moved in. More Black families filled up the housing project over time and White resistance ended. At the end of the conflict, there was still animosity between the two races, and even Jewish store-keepers as far as Hastings neighborhood near the Detroit River felt the consequences. Up to two months after the resolution of the Sojourner Truth Project, there were reports of altercations between Jewish shopkeepers and Black youths, requiring heavy police presence in an area completely separated from the original protests.<sup>36</sup>

The events that precipitated the 1943 Detroit Race Riots were not completely ignored by community leaders. Both Jewish and Black community leaders were sympathetic to the conditions and created associations to help build an understanding between the two groups. Jewish storekeepers formed the East Side Merchants

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<sup>36</sup> Capeci, "Black-Jewish Relations," 225.

Association, and many Jews got involved in providing assistance to their Black neighbors, providing food for those in need, sponsoring dinners, and donating money to many civic causes. Blacks involved in a variety of organizations, including the NAACP and YMCA, voiced their support and understanding for Jews in return. However, their voice was not as loud as those who opposed Jewish assistance, especially amid severe deterioration of race relations. Black militancy was at an all-time high, and most organizational leadership encouraged the use of force in the face of unrelenting oppression by the opposing race.<sup>37</sup>

The Office of Facts and Figures, a U.S. government agency created by Franklin D. Roosevelt for “the purpose of facilitating the dissemination of factual information to the citizens of the country on the progress of the defense effort and on the defense policies and activities of the Government,” observed the antagonism and provided an uncertain trajectory for the city: “unless strong and quick intervention by some high official, preferably the President, is taken at once, hell is going to be let loose.”<sup>38</sup> With the volatile environment reaching a tipping point, a full-blown riot became inevitable. Just over one year after the conclusion of the Sojourner Truth Project, came the devastating Detroit Race Riots of 1943.

On June 20, 1943, the unsettling prediction by the Office of Facts and Figures proved to be true. A full-blown riot in Detroit had officially begun after violence erupted between White and Black youths on Belle Isle, an island park on the Detroit River. Belle Isle, a popular island park that many enjoyed as a means of “escaping the city,” had

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<sup>37</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *Toward Freedom Land: The Long Struggle for Racial Equality in America* (Lexington: e University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 44.

<sup>38</sup> Sitkoff, *Toward Freedom Land*, 46.

upwards to 100,000 people in it on the day of the riots.<sup>39</sup> Fighting between Whites and Blacks began as a struggle for resources; the capacity for the island boathouse was filled, inventory for refreshments were low, and there was a lack of canoes to fulfill the demand of those who wanted to enjoy paddling in the Detroit River. The island also had areas unofficially designated for Whites and Blacks only, but both groups mingled for resources, adding to their increasing frustrations with each other. When the fighting began, people were notified in nearby parts of the city, resulting in hordes of citizens arriving to the island and nearby areas, overwhelming authorities and exacerbating the situation. While there were no gunshots or fatalities, the fighting lasted on Belle Isle until 2:00 AM, resulting in 47 arrests and the spread of violence throughout the rest of the city.<sup>40</sup>

Continuing the patterns on Belle Isle, unrest culminated throughout Detroit. Rumors between White and Black groups spread, demonizing each other and creating sensationalist stories of murder, torture, and oppression. Groups of rioters crowded the city after 2:00 AM, attacking and destroying businesses. White men who were unlucky enough to be found among the large groups of Blacks had their cars stoned and were beaten badly. The violence also reached Black passerby's, many who were caught downtown or in areas considered "outside the ghetto" by their assailants. Although segregation did not exist in Detroit, there were various neighborhoods and blocks that were not inviting to Blacks. Even Blacks found at popular businesses, such as movie theaters near downtown, were beaten during the early morning hours.<sup>41</sup> Police was unable

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<sup>39</sup> Sitkoff, *Toward Freedom Land*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>41</sup> Sitkoff, *Toward Freedom Land*, 49.

to respond effectively to the rioting that spread throughout the city, because many felt they could not provide the protection, and because many did not want to risk their own safety. Additionally, some officers in the police force were also racist, unwilling to get involved if a Black person was being beaten by a gang of White people.<sup>42</sup>

One thing White people had in 1943 Detroit that Black people lacked, was property. Most of the commercial and residential property was owned by Whites, much of it Jewish-owned or German-owned. In the most popular commercial districts, while the property may have belonged to any White, the most destroyed commercial properties were the grocery stores that carried liquors, meats, or a combination of the two products. Most of these storefronts were run by the Jewish population, and rioting destroyed almost every business on Hastings Street, resulting in devastated store owners and mass-looting. The destruction turned the commercial district into an “open-air market,” and eventually, looting spread to every kind of store: gun shops, clothing retailers, taverns, pawn shops, and pharmacies.<sup>43</sup> Several reporters claimed that Jewish-owned stores were primarily targeted, although it could have been simply due to the stores carrying favored items for looting.<sup>44</sup> However, it was enough for both Black and White journalists to assume that Jews were targeted before others.

Due to the extensive destruction of commercial properties along the Hastings Street neighborhoods, an inquiry was made to build an understanding of Black-Jewish relations at these places of business.<sup>45</sup> Headed by a professor of sociology and other

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Capeci, “Black-Jewish Relations,” 225.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Capeci, “Black-Jewish Relations,” 230.

experts, Black citizens and Jewish storekeepers were interviewed and asked questions like: “Are Negroes more likely to steal than white men?” and “Is a black skin a sign of inferiority?”<sup>46</sup> Many Black citizens could not confirm the difference between a “White person” and a Jewish person and thus could not answer a question about whether the Jews were purposefully targeted during the rioting. Community organizations on both sides were involved in the research project as well, impatiently searching for reasons or causes for the broken relationship between the two groups. The inquiry also compared Jewish proprietors with Black proprietors, finding that the responses were almost identical. Both groups had similar problems as business-owners, with closely aligned dissatisfactions with their customer base (such as theft) but both groups also reported a majority feeling of respect for their clientele. Through the surveys, the antagonisms were not immediately obvious. But for the lower-class Blacks who lived and spent their money at the commercial district on Hastings Street where the majority of stores were Jewish-owned, three perspectives were prevalent: Jews were rich; they could deprive Black competitors out of their property, and people believed that Jews were only after their money.<sup>47</sup>

Overall, the surveys found problems in Black-Jewish relations prior to the 1943 Riots that did not settle after the ending. After two days, federal troops were called to finally put a stop to the rioting.<sup>48</sup> By this time, the destruction had reached massive numbers: 34 dead, 433 injured, \$2 million dollars’ worth of property damage (worth

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>48</sup> Dominic J. Capeci Jr., *Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1991), 52.



\$27.6 million in 2016) and loss of one million war production hours, much needed as the United States was preparing to land in Normandy less than a year later.<sup>49</sup> Roughly 1,800 people were arrested and commercial districts were completely destroyed. In the ensuing years, the Hastings Street commercial district would have its Jewish storekeepers replaced with Black entrepreneurs, as the Jewish population continued to move north towards other areas.<sup>50</sup>

The execrable race relations and lack of order in the city center led to the Jewish population leaving for the northwest border of Detroit. Already a migration pattern among the Jewish community, the construction of better housing stock and neighborhoods accelerated the movement towards the suburbs.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Capeci, *Layered Violence*, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Capeci, "Black-Jewish Relations," 235.

<sup>51</sup> Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 23.

## V.

### 1943-1967: Race Relations and the Business Environment

“Be careful going up the sagging step, Sabah, be careful on your bike, be careful on the makeshift swing that swoops and trembles in the locust tree near the Third Avenue traffic. Beware of fire, Sabah, of things that burn and cut and all the things that hurt. And don’t grow up to be a grocer, Sabah, be something better, something bigger, something safer...”<sup>52</sup>

After the riots were settled by the federal troops and peace was forcibly restored, Detroit endured years of economic uncertainty, degrading race-relations and population loss. The generous manufacturing contracts brought to the city during World War II were gone by the 1950s, and the population surge during the 1930s and 1940s also came to a halt. The economic base of the city was heavily manufacturing, and many jobs disappeared after the conclusion of the war. For the nearly one million people who became residents during the previous three decades, this also meant a struggle for employment. During the years after the 1943 Race Riots, the demographics of Detroit changed dramatically. The demographic change continued the path to become predominantly Black by the 1970s. By the time of the 1967 Riots, nearly 300,000 residents would leave Detroit, most settling in the growing suburban cities. The high population loss was mostly of White residents. The exit of the White population began the depletion of the tax base, increased the percentage of the population dependent on social welfare, decreased property values, increased poverty and crime rates, redlining,

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<sup>52</sup> Barbara Stanton, “Tearful Widow Tells Son: ‘Don’t Be a Grocer, Sabah.” *Detroit Free Press*, May 30, 1967.

and led to an overall increase in prosperity in suburban cities outside of Detroit. Eventually, Oakland County, the county that borders Detroit to the north, would become one of the wealthiest in the United States, and the newly designed interstate system at the end of the 1950s accelerated the rate of these occurrences. These changes in demographics and wealth in the city of Detroit also changed the business environment in ways that ultimately provided opportunity to the Chaldean community, increasing store ownership into the hundreds by the time of the 1967 Riots.

The demographics of the business environment happened to change as well. In the years following the 1943 Detroit Riots, the Hastings commercial district close to the Detroit River would gradually be taken over by entrepreneurial Blacks. The Jewish population continued to move towards the north of the city, and after feeling targeted through the calamity of the Riots, hurriedly sold their businesses and vacated their once heavy commercial district. Commercial and entrepreneurial activity would have to continue north of the city center.

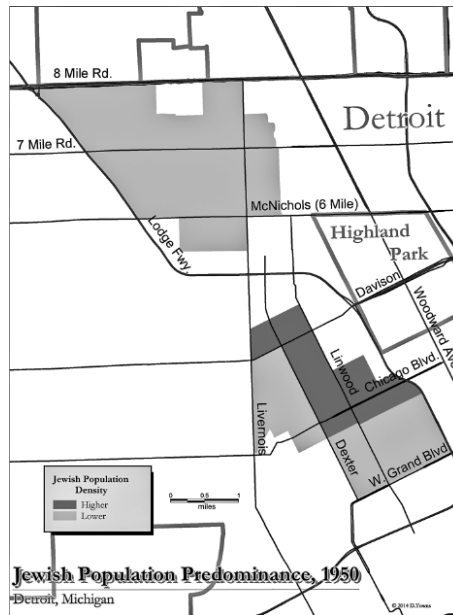


Figure 3. By 1950, most of the Jewish population left the Hastings neighborhood and moved to northern parts of the city. “Overview of Jewish neighborhoods, synagogues, and landmarks in Detroit.” Map created by Patricia Becker and Douglas Towns; Taken from Lila Corwin Berman, “Locating and Relocating the Jewish Neighborhoods of Detroit,” in *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit*, 38.

Population density close to the city center continued to rise for many years, mostly due to Black residents moving in.<sup>53</sup> The living conditions – like those before World War I – were still unreasonable due to overcrowding, and the business demographics reflected the increased change.<sup>54</sup> At the time, the area around Hastings where there was a large presence of Black-owned businesses, primarily in theatres and nightclubs, was called Paradise Valley. The residential areas with deplorable living conditions were called Black Bottom. Prior to the 1943 Riots, Black-owned businesses based in entertainment flourished. With the constant migration from the south and the growing population of Blacks, this area is considered the roots to parts of the Jazz

<sup>53</sup> William Loren Katz, ed., *Haynes and Brown: The Negro in Detroit and Washington* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

movement, Blues music, and the origin of Motown. Before the 1943 Riots, the area saw plenty of diversity in clientele, with many Whites coming to enjoy the entertainment and take part in festivities.<sup>55</sup> It was a cultural hub for Blacks, and became a symbol of prosperity compared to living in the southern United States, despite the generally poor race-relations in the city. Although the 1943 Riots increased the amount of Black-owned businesses after the Jewish population continued moving north, diversity in customer base decreased due to fears created by the Riots.

Meanwhile, the Jewish community continued to establish their communities north of the city center.<sup>56</sup> In an effort through several Jewish-owned companies and institutions, the marketing of moving north to develop predominantly ethnic neighborhoods began. If it had not already become apparent due to the racial violence close to the city center, Jewish leaders pushed for a move north with the construction of brand new synagogues, community centers, and encouraged the creation of Jewish-centric neighborhoods to replace those destroyed in the 1943 Riots. Parts of the housing market in northwest Detroit were specifically marketed towards Jewish residents, and the idea of settling elsewhere as a community helped fuel migration. Advertisements to fill the neighborhoods with Jewish families were constantly made in the *Detroit Jewish News*, a popular publication for the Jewish community.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Jeremy Williams, "The Rise and Fall of Black Bottom," M.A. Thesis, Prescott College, 2011, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (1492315).

<sup>56</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, 37.

<sup>57</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, 39.

**RANCH BUNGALOW**  
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*Between Outer Drive and 7 Mile Road*



**OPEN DAILY 1 to 9 P. M.**

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- *Near 7-Mile Road-Livernois Intersection*
- *Fastest Growing Jewish Section in the City*

For Sale by  
**KOPMAN BUILDING CO.**

Figure 4. 1949 advertisement claiming a section of northwest Detroit as the “Fastest Growing Jewish Section in the City.” Taken from *Detroit Jewish News*, July 1, 1949, p19 Classifieds.

The campaign to move north proved successful in the ensuing years. The Jewish community was financially strong, with a great network across large cities to obtain financing for the community projects and marketing efforts. Having been involved in commerce and business since the end of the 19th century in Detroit, they allowed themselves to be mobile. Even if the district was populated by Italians, Poles, or Blacks, many of the property and store-fronts in these neighborhoods likely had Jewish ownership.<sup>58</sup> And while Detroit boomed with capital and population in the first half of the

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<sup>58</sup> Waltzer, “East European Jewish Detroit,” 298.

20th century, so did the wealth of the Jewish proprietors. By 1958, northwest Detroit officially became the center of the Jewish community, as almost two-thirds of the total Jewish population reported living in the area.<sup>59</sup> This was a significant change from 1949, as only about one-third of the total Jewish population could be located in northwest Detroit.

Changes to the infrastructure of Detroit led to moves further north for the population that could afford it. The passing of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 officially created funding for what would become the Interstate Highway System. Detroit already had a significant system of roads and state highways due to having one of the largest populations in the United States during the 1950s and a large car-culture. The presence of the automotive industry and heavy industrialization of the city slowly replaced rail transportation with busses and vehicles. With the aid of the federal program that required tax allocation, eminent domain, and clearing of many neighborhoods, the first highways in metropolitan-Detroit were fully constructed by 1959. This had drastic effects on the city, as a resident could live in a suburban community and commute to dense commercial districts – including the city center – in a reasonable amount of time compared to using rail or bus transportation. Many residents went for the suburbs to escape high taxes, congestion, crime, and an opportunity to chase the American Dream, as owning property in the suburbs was affordable. The creation of the highway system also destroyed popular historical districts, including Paradise Valley and Hastings Street.

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<sup>59</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, 38.



Figure 5. 1944 and 1990s aerial photo of downtown Detroit and surrounding neighborhoods. Large tracts of land were flattened to create the Interstate Highway System. Taken from <http://usa.streetsblog.org/2014/06/24/7-photos-show-how-detroit-hollowed-out-during-the-highway-age/>.

Accordingly, the Jewish community joined the population flight to the suburbs. The new highway was very close to their established community in northwest Detroit, and Jewish communities began to emerge in two suburban cities in the 1960s: Oak Park and Huntington Woods, both in Oakland County.<sup>60</sup> These moves were mostly fueled by the Jewish population living within a mile from the city center, near the Highland Park enclave. The Detroit Jewish population continued to decrease, as only 55% lived within the city limits in 1963, down from 79% in 1958.<sup>61</sup> Altogether, the flight from the city also changed the dynamics of the business

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<sup>60</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, 39.

<sup>61</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, 40.



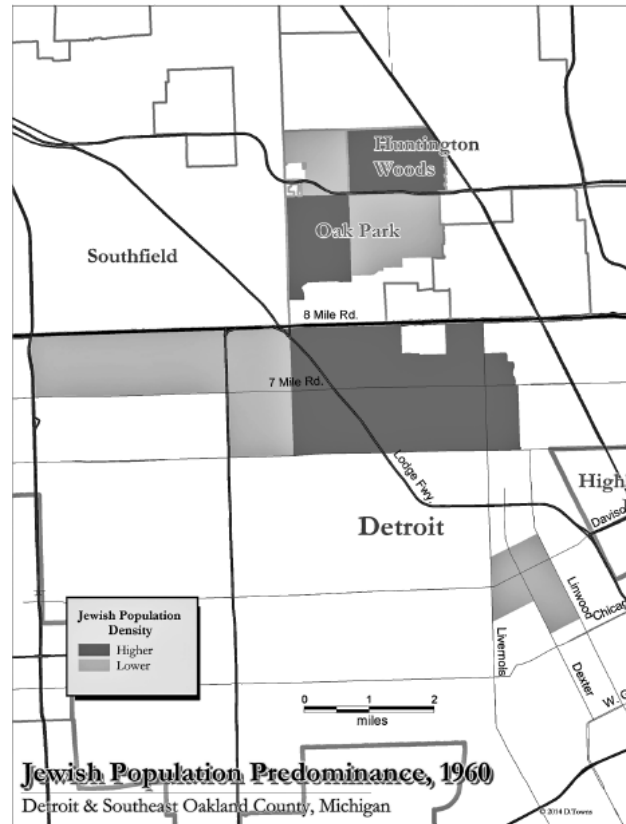


Figure 6. During the 1960s, the Jewish community would form the majority of their population outside of Detroit city limits. “Overview of Jewish neighborhoods, synagogues, and landmarks in Detroit.” Map created by Patricia Becker and Douglas Towns; Taken from Lila Corwin Berman, “Locating and Relocating the Jewish Neighborhoods of Detroit,” in *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit*, 40.

environment. Many Jews became involved in other occupations, and slowly moved away from running small grocery stores in the city.

The Chaldean community arrived to take advantage of these opportunities. A community that was still relatively small but growing, the Chaldeans did not find heavy success being employed in other sectors, and store ownership was still a lucrative occupation for the community. With a combination of factors, more importantly the availability of the businesses and involving immediate family and relatives in business matters, many of the businesses and real estate were transferred from the Jewish community to the Chaldean community. From the 1920s through the 1950s, the majority

of Chaldeans still called Detroit home.<sup>62</sup> Most of the Chaldeans lived on the opposite side of Woodward Avenue from the Jewish population, in an area that would later be called “Chaldean Town.” But in the 1960s, the trend of moving outside the city limits also started within the Chaldean community, and many moved to outside suburbs, some in Oak Park and Southfield. In 1943, the Chaldean community numbered just nine hundred, but by 1963, the number swelled to around three thousand.<sup>63</sup> In terms of involvement in the grocery markets, only four were owned by Chaldeans in 1923, but by 1962, at least 120 were under Chaldean ownership.<sup>64</sup> Comparing total population to occupation, it is estimated that at least half of the Chaldean families in 1962 had ownership in a large or small grocery store.<sup>65</sup>

The birth of the Interstate Highway System sped the increase of residents choosing the suburban communities over living in the city. While the Jewish population and other residents began to leave Detroit after the 1943 Riots, the Chaldean population slowly continued to grow. The Chaldeans were not a wealthy, established community during this time, and their main occupation involved owner-operating grocery markets. As Chaldeans were not significantly involved in the automotive industry, they continued to pursue store ownership, in contrast to those who left it behind. Ultimately, these patterns contributed to the heavy growth of Chaldean ownership in the grocery markets in 1962, while previous groups enjoyed other opportunities.

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<sup>62</sup> Bacall, *Chaldeans in Detroit*, 60.

<sup>63</sup> Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan*, 6.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*.

## VI.

### 1967 Riots

The months leading up to the civil disturbances – popularly called the riots – on July 23, 1967, continued to be difficult for shopkeepers. The trend of population loss, higher crime rate, deteriorating race relations, and problems in the inner city worsened the situation in Detroit. Civil Rights groups, many of which were militant and persuaded their members to destroy property, continued to rise in opposition to what they believed was constant oppression through public and private entities.

One way to understand how grocers dealt with new problems is to read the Associated Food Dealers of Greater Detroit’s publication, *The Food Dealer*. The Associated Food Dealers of Greater Detroit (AFD) was a trade association for independent retailers that, through their publication *The Food Dealer*, provided advice on fighting crime, increasing profits, decreasing taxes, as well as tips for improving store-quality and customer experience, and more importantly, provided a way for thousands of independent retailers to reach the government.<sup>66</sup> *The Food Dealer* also acted as a newspaper, providing updates on new events – such as deaths, new store openings, career changes, achievements – and jokes within the member base.<sup>67</sup> The target audience for this publication was primarily large grocery markets, not smaller convenience or liquor stores.

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<sup>66</sup> “Grocers Protest Meat Inspections,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 11, 1965.

<sup>67</sup> Alex Bell, “When Cookies Crumble, Switch to Bagels,” *Food Dealer*, July-August, 1965.

Precursors to the 1967 riots can be seen in some of its earlier issues, through the increasing inclusion of warnings on how to fight new crimes and the coverage of new government regulations and claims that retailers felt were aimed at them. One of the new crimes described was shopping cart theft. At the time, city ordinances fined retailers when police officers returned their carts, and some customers found alternative uses for carts.<sup>68</sup> In many areas, customers did not own a vehicle and depended on public transportation to get home. Other customers who lived closer to the grocery market pushed the shopping cart all the way home to unload their groceries, and sometimes returned the carts later. Efforts to stop the carts from leaving the store property resulted in creative solutions: metal posts around store exits that forced customers to bring their vehicle up to load their groceries, a “neighborhood watch” program rewarding those who returned stray carts with coupons, and a magnet system that automatically locked the wheels of a cart if it went too far away from the parking lot, a newer technology that was utilized by a local grocery market chain on the east side of Detroit in 1965.<sup>69</sup> In the mid-1960s, there were about 7500 shopping cart thefts per year in Detroit-area grocery stores, which caused losses worth about \$250,000 annually.<sup>70</sup>

To remain competitive and expand their services, grocery stores provided a check cashing service for customers, sometimes without fees. This service allowed the working-class customer-base in the inner-city to cash their checks when the banks were closed, in an attempt on the part of the store owners to develop a stronger store loyalty and make

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<sup>68</sup> “Why Don’t Supermarkets Prosecute Cart Thieves?” *Detroit Free Press*, February 17, 1965.

<sup>69</sup> “Independents Pave Way in Helping to Curtail Shopping Cart Losses,” *Food Dealer*, November, 1965.

<sup>70</sup> “Associated Food Dealers and FIC to Launch Shopping Cart Program,” *Food Dealer*, April-May, 1966.

the grocery store a place that provided all kinds of services. However, criminals quickly realized how to exploit the easy process of opening checking accounts and began ripping defrauding grocers by using fraudulent checks. Up to 80% of the checks presented to Detroit-area retail stores in 1965 were fraudulent.<sup>71</sup> After this type of crime was first reported, several issues of *The Food Dealer* included prominent advertisements for check-cashing systems and banks. Some of the solutions retail stores put in effect to battle this crime included only cashing checks if backed from specific savings banks, using a tech-savvy system to take a picture of the customer cashing the check, and charging fees to handle checks.

Food prices also began to rise in 1965, forcing grocery stores to decide between increasing prices or collecting a lower profit-margin. However, the federal government's explanation for price increases in the grocery stores differed from retailers'. According to *The Food Dealer*, an increase in the loss of labor, the handling, and the transportation costs were the major reasons for higher food prices. Inadequate labor supply on the farms was the primary reason, as the cost of labor and raw products was directly reflected in the retail food prices, which led to increases in the store, that were eventually passed on to customers.<sup>72</sup> The federal government accused grocers of increasing food prices without having a substantial reason, insisting that they were gouging prices. This accusation did not help the image of the minority grocers, whom some of their inner-city customers already viewed with suspicion and had accused of price gouging.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> "Must the Retailers do a Bankers Job?" *Food Dealer*, July-August, 1965.

<sup>72</sup> "Association Report Blasts Government for Blaming Foodmen," *Food Dealer*, September, 1966.

<sup>73</sup> "Operation Price Tag," *Food Dealer*, October, 1966.

The AFD's answer to the Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman – a federal employee who personally accused grocers of price gouging – was to bring back Public Law 78. Public Law 78 – also called the Bracero Program – was a law that confirmed a series of agreements between Mexico and the United States allowing Mexican laborers to work on U.S. farms.<sup>74</sup> These agreements (under different names) were initially created in 1941 after the United States entered World War II, as an answer to an expected shortage in agricultural workers.<sup>75</sup> After 1955, the program was slowly reduced, until its termination in 1964. However, a manual labor shortage on the farms persisted, and the AFD advocated for foreign labor “since domestic labor needed to do the job [was] practically non-existent.”<sup>76</sup> The problem went unresolved, because these labor jobs were hard, especially considering their low-pay, and students, who were expected to fill this shortage need, did not do so quickly enough.<sup>77</sup>

Independent grocers also felt threatened by unionization efforts of the different workers: stock boys, cashiers, and other positions of labor in the grocery market. Large grocery store chains – such as Kroger and Bi-Lo – were already in agreements with union workers went on strike immediately after the riots. After thousands of workers united for 12 days, the two grocery chains agreed to give pay increases to their workers for at least the following three-years, instead of freezing their pay rates.<sup>78</sup> Labor strikes in other sectors outside the actual store, such as the Delano grape strike that began in 1965, also

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<sup>74</sup> “State Farms are in a Pickle,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 30, 1964.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> “Association Report Blasts Government for Blaming Foodmen,” *Food Dealer*, September, 1966.

<sup>77</sup> “Increased Food Prices Not Retailers Fault,” *Food Dealer*, April-May, 1966.

<sup>78</sup> “Kroger, Bi-Lo Employees Approve New Contract,” *Food Dealer*, September-October, 1967.

affected grocers. This strike was blamed for another increase in food prices and food waste, as grapes were left to rot in the vines.<sup>79</sup> Union members showed up at some Detroit area grocery stores, and protested in front of the store entrances, preventing fruit deliveries and driving away customers. The blocking of business and deliveries was short-lived, but these problems were also quoted as one of the causes in the increases of food prices.

All these events, the increase in food prices, the blame from the federal government, the threats of unionization, the check-cashing fraud and the stolen property were all unfortunate, but the real decline in the industry came from the crime stories published in the magazine. Whenever a member of the AFD was killed or hurt at his place of business, a detailed story was published. These stories – along with other violent crimes – also increased in the wake of the 1967 riots. One story provided a detailed description of the violence:

“Two Detroit grocers were shot by bandits last week and a third grocer was stabbed, as crime continues to increase in the Motor City. AFD member Benjamin Rubenstein, 61, said a man stabbed him with an ice pick in the elbow after he had given the bandit about \$75 from the cash register. Rubenstein, owner of the Beechwood Market, 6300 Beechwood, said he struggled with the thugs until he pulled a gun and fled. Two other Detroit grocers were shot—one by his own gun—in separate holdups last week. Albert Yezbick, 65, was wounded in an exchange of gunfire with three young men who entered his store on John R. Angered when he demanded proof of their age after ordering liquor, they pulled out guns and told both Yezbick and his son, Victor, also behind the counter: ‘We want all your guns.’ The youths then opened fire without provocation and fled from the store almost immediately, but not before seriously wounding Yezbick in the hip. His son followed the bandits outside and fired three shots at them. He was joined by a passerby carrying a revolver with a concealed weapons permit. The passerby fired six shots at the bandits’ car as it drove off. Another grocer, Melvin Doughty, 65, was wounded by his own gun after two youths broke into his store on Beaubien and attacked him with a meat hook. Doughty told police he had just closed his store at 9 p.m. when the young thugs broke in through the front door. One carrying a meat hook hit him until he dropped a .38 caliber revolver he had drawn to protect himself. The youth snatched the gun and shot Doughty in the right shoulder.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Patrick J. Owens, “Reuther Aids Grape Strikers,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 18, 1965.

<sup>80</sup> “Crimes Continue: Bandits Shoot Two Grocers, Stab Another,” *Food Dealer*, November, 1966.

Later, *The Food Dealer* also published the killing of a Chaldean store owner, Jubrail Kasgorgis. Kasgorgis was stabbed to death at his business in April 1966. He left behind a wife and four children who relied on him financially. An immigrant farmer from Iraq, Kasgorgis was only 35 years old and his death shocked the AFD members, who demanded big changes on how the Detroit Police Department tackled crime. Edward Deeb, the executive editor at the time, wrote: “A very small minority of good-for-nothing hoodlums are making life miserable for all law-abiding citizens, regardless of nationality, color, or creed,” as a response to the rising violent crime in the city.<sup>81</sup> In the same editorial, the association asked for at least 1,000 more police officers to protest the “humanly intolerable condition of increased holdups, breaking and entering, murders, severe bodily injury, shoplifting, bad-check passing, property damage, and shopping cart losses.”<sup>82</sup> A year after the slaying of Kasgorgis, the AFD launched a fund campaign, to help provide Kasgorgis’s family with clothes, furniture, toys, appliances, and other forms of financial assistance.<sup>83</sup>

Incidents like the killing of Kasgorgis were not foreign to the grocers in Detroit. The crime rate rose exponentially, making Detroit one of the most dangerous cities in the United States. Over a one year period, from 1965 to 1966, crimes in the following categories rose significantly: holdups, from 1,173 to 1700; break-ins, from 140 to 208; grand larceny thefts from 795 to 951; and simple grand larceny thefts from 3,098 to

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<sup>81</sup> “AFD Asks for 1,000 More Police as Crime Increases,” *Food Dealer*, April-May, 1966.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> “Readers Help Family of Slain Grocer,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 1, 1967.



3,526.<sup>84</sup> City services were so overwhelmed that police could take up to thirty minutes to respond to an emergency call or hold-up alarm. Grocers – both large and small – were unable to buy adequate insurance for their stores because the increasing number of claims made it unprofitable for insurers to provide coverage. When property damage occurred, store owners had to pay for the damages from their own pockets. In many cases, the stores replaced their windows with brick or other material, including blocking them with iron bars.<sup>85</sup>

Some columns in the magazine were entirely devoted on how to protect the store owner from crime. In one editorial titled “Don’t Be A Dead Hero,” Edward Deeb wrote about the steps a grocer could take to protect his business:

- “1—Clear Clutter From Windows. Stores with cluttered windows make easy prey for bandits. Remove large signs and posters so people or police can see into your store.
- 2— Clear Clutter Around Checkouts and Registers. A clear view plus clean and tidy checkouts will also discourage holdup men. Always keep a minimum amount of cash in the registers, especially if in direct view of shoppers.
- 3—Brighten Stores With Better Lighting. Improved lighting both inside and outside the stores will help discourage crime, especially at night when most holdups occur.
- 4— Keep New Emergency Police Number Near Phone. The new “Operation Impact” emergency phone number of Detroit Police is 225-1212. Keep it handy.”<sup>86</sup>

The first step was widely ignored, as most grocers eventually removed most of their store windows for fear of break-ins and bullets. Some classified ads used the raising crime rate as a selling point for their offers. For example, the first line of an

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<sup>84</sup> Edward Deeb, “Don’t Be a Dead Hero,” *Food Dealer*, April-May, 1966.

<sup>85</sup> “AFD Asks for 1,000 More Police as Crime Increases,” *Food Dealer*, April-May, 1966.

<sup>86</sup> Deeb, “Don’t Be a Dead Hero.”

advertisement for a store in a rural area read: “Get away from High Crime rate and Urban Renewal.”<sup>87</sup>

On July 23, 1967, the situation exploded. Years of raising racial tension, murders, theft, and overall violence culminated in the most devastating riots in the history of the United States. An illegal bar – called a “blind pig” – was open past 2:00AM, which was the latest an establishment could distribute alcohol in the State of Michigan. The police raided the establishment where over 80 Black people were celebrating the return of several Vietnam War veterans, and subsequently arrested all of them. The police decided to arrest everybody, instead of just the management, because a few of them resisted arrests the police thought they recognized some patrons as people wanted for other crimes.<sup>88</sup> Although the street was well known for having “blind pigs,” the fact that the manager of this particular one was behind on paying off the police, was the direct cause of the raid.<sup>89</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> Street, where the bar was located, was full of activity 24-hours a day. Around 4:00AM when the arrests were made in front of the establishment, a crowd of over 200 people showed up, including people who were drinking at other blind pigs, gamblers from underground casinos, prostitutes, and other street drifters.<sup>90</sup> The onlookers were not happy with what they saw – a large group of black people getting arrested simply for drinking past the legal time – and mistreatment of the arrested men, as one-by-one they were being put into patrol cars. Soon thereafter, glass bottles were being thrown

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<sup>87</sup> “Good Investment Property, Business, and Home for Sale.” *Food Dealer*, April-May, 1966.

<sup>88</sup> Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 156.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

at the officers as the crowd grew in size. Racial tension was evident and when one person yelled “Black Power... look what they are doing to our people... let’s get the bricks and bottles going,” another answered with: “If this happened in Grosse Pointe [an affluent, majority White city bordering Detroit] they wouldn’t be acting this way.”<sup>91</sup> After the police left with the arrested patrons, the rioting began in full force. The building adjacent to the raided blind pig was the first to burn. Many more buildings would follow.

In the first 12 hours of the riots, around 1500 police officers were involved in monitoring the violent unrest.<sup>92</sup> All types of businesses were broken into on 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and before the police could react by removing access to guns, several shops selling rifles, shotguns, and pistols were looted. Some rioters broke into residential and commercial property, set-up shop on the rooftop, and acted as snipers, shooting at police officers. By the 16<sup>th</sup> hour, drastic measures were taken to contain the property destruction and violence, including sending a majority Black police presence in the 12<sup>th</sup> Street area, and the summoning of the Michigan State Police and Michigan National Guard by Governor George Romney.<sup>93</sup> Shortly after, Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh pleaded with leaders in the Black community – civil rights activists, business-owners, spiritual leaders and civil servants – during an emergency meeting to “do everything you have to do, just bring peace and order back to our city.”<sup>94</sup>

Within 22 hours after the raiding of the blind pig, at least 11,000 people were out on the streets of Detroit, overwhelming the city firefighters and police officers, Michigan

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<sup>91</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 160.

<sup>92</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 170.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-183.

state police, Michigan National Guard, and anybody who tried to reason with the looters. Firefighters from Windsor, Ontario, Canada showed up to assist in the previous evening, one firefighter claiming that they weren't fighting fires, but "firestorms."<sup>95</sup> During this second day of rioting, Black leaders unsuccessfully attempted to calm the violence. Even Congressman John Conyers – one of the few Black congressman's and member of the Civil Rights Movement – drove through the neighborhood and begged the rioters to return home through a loudspeaker, but rocks and bottles were thrown at his car.<sup>96</sup> The looting was so bad that one reporter said that "12th Street became an eight-block long supermarket with no check-out counters."<sup>97</sup> One such store on 12<sup>th</sup> Street was Starbright Market, one of the first to be completely looted and burned to the ground.<sup>98</sup>

Firefighters were not necessarily seen as heroic or respected by the rioters, and often dealt being shot at and having bottles thrown at their trucks, sometimes forcing them to avoid the situation and return later.<sup>99</sup> Friendly fire also became an issue. State guardsman were accused of being "trigger happy" and accidentally shot each other.<sup>100</sup> Detroit law enforcement officers and state guardsman also exchanged fire. In many cases, White public servants – police, guardsman and firefighters – made racial remarks, acted against Blacks out of frustration, and unfairly arrested some innocent bystanders.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Herb Colling, *Turning Points: The Detroit Riot of 1967: A Canadian Perspective* (Toronto: Natural Heritage, 2003), 45.

<sup>96</sup> Colling, *Turning Point*, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 186.

<sup>98</sup> Colling, *Turning Point*, 42.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>100</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 199.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

Throughout the city, various large-scale employers shuttered their businesses until further notice, including General Motors, Chrysler Corporation, Kroger, A&P, Wayne State University, University of Detroit, and Marygrove College.<sup>102</sup> Flights, professional sporting events, and most city services, including waste management, public libraries, and bus transportation, also halted operations.<sup>103</sup>

Once it was understood that the rioting could not be contained, Governor George Romney requested that federal troops intervene. The request was fulfilled nearly 17 hours later, followed by President Lyndon B. Johnson addressing the nation on television just before midnight on July 24, 1967.<sup>104</sup> In his address, President Johnson made it clear that the United States Army Divisions – the 101<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne units – being sent were the same units involved in helping end segregation in Little Rock, Arkansas and Oxford, Mississippi, by protecting schoolchildren and James Meredith while they entered educational institutions.<sup>105</sup>

By the end of July 27, violence settled to a level comfortable enough for Army troops to begin leaving the city. Two days later, the last fatality occurred through an accidental shooting of a 19-year old Black male by a paratrooper.<sup>106</sup> On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, Lawrence Vance, the Secretary of State under Lyndon B. Johnson, officially declared “Law and order have been restored to Detroit,” after the absence of rioting for several

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<sup>102</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 202.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 214.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 230.

days.<sup>107</sup> The final statistics displayed the destruction and devastation of the rioting: 43 dead, 7,231 arrests, and 2,509 stores were either looted, burned, or destroyed.<sup>108</sup>

Out of the 2,509 stores, 611 belonged to the “supermarkets, food, and grocery stores,” category, 285 belonged to the “liquor stores, bars, and lounges,” and 240 were drugstores.<sup>109</sup> An estimated 27% of destroyed stores were Black-owned, and many deterred rioters because they lived near their businesses and protected their property with weapons.<sup>110</sup> In the principal riot area, only half of the 78 Jewish-owned stores (15% of total businesses) survived destruction.<sup>111</sup> Most Jewish-owned businesses in 1967 were on the west side of Detroit, an area wealthier than other parts of the city that was mostly unharmed by the riots.<sup>112</sup> The group that suffered the greatest damage from the rioting were the Chaldeans, who owned a total of 192 food stores in the city comprising of large grocery markets, smaller neighborhood markets and liquor stores.<sup>113</sup> Only three or four of these stores were left unscathed.

The 1967 Detroit Riots were the worst civil disorder to take place in the United States during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the total damage done to the city in the form of property destruction, it showed the continued instability of race-relations. Most those who were arrested, killed, and participated in the riots, were Black. The riots proved that the severe racial antagonism and hostility could escalate to a point where order is

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>111</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 293.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>113</sup> John Reiter, “Chaldean Merchants Hard-Hit,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 26, 1967.

completely lost. Besides the large number of destroyed food stores, every type of store with desirable goods was targeted, whether the store sold furniture or shoes; guitars or guns; cheap clothes or expensive coats. Popular chain stores, including Kresge, Kroger, Saks Fifth Avenue, K-Mart, and A&P, were completely looted and destroyed.<sup>114</sup>

Residents and proprietors had already responded to the rising crime rates and increased costs of doing business in the city by leaving for the suburbs, but the riots accelerated the level of flight to an unprecedented level that the city of Detroit would never recover from.

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<sup>114</sup> Roger Simpson and John Reiter, "100 Businesses Totally Guttled, Thousands Jobless," *Detroit Free Press*, July 26, 1967.

## VII.

### Post 1967 Riots to 1990: A New Majority

“I live on Detroit’s northwest side and remember that as soon as our neighborhood began its racial change, the major chains began abandoning us - but only after allowing their stores to deteriorate in cleanliness and service. Then the Chaldeans came and gave us clean, efficient and friendly stores open at convenient times, charging reasonable prices. What are our complaints against them – that they stick together and are willing to sacrifice for their families’ futures? I think we all can learn a lesson from their dedication to what we used to call the American Dream, that is, hard work and sacrifice lead to success and that the road is open to all who are willing to pay the price to travel it.”<sup>115</sup>

The 1967 Riots completely altered the business-environment of Detroit.

Merchants of all kinds, including grocers, were stuck in a position where they endured total, or partial loss due to the riots. Most Detroit businesses dealt with one or more of the following consequences of the riots: forced to sell at a loss because the value of their business declined, insurance only covered partial costs or nothing, heavy increase of crime prevented rebuilding in many areas, crime deterred employment opportunities, inability to secure loans from banks, significant loss of investment, and most importantly, fear of safety for those who returned and rebuilt their business.<sup>116</sup> Many who reopened stores decreased their inventory in fear of another riot or break-ins, affecting their ability

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<sup>115</sup> Bert Osterberg, “Chaldeans Filled in When Major Chains Left City,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 1, 1980.

<sup>116</sup> Jonathan J. Bean, “Burn, Baby, Burn’: Small Business in the Urban Riots of the 1960s,” *Independent Review* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 174.



to buy in bulk to save money, decreasing their profits and delaying a return to normal business practices.<sup>117</sup>

About a month after the end of the riots, the AFD interviewed large grocers concerning their plans. About 1/4 said they would get out of business or relocate their business to a suburb, while the rest said they would rebuild if they could receive enough insurance coverage and police protection. Some grocers were understandably angry, looking to sue the city for the lack of police action in the beginning of the riots, hoping to re-coup their losses.<sup>118</sup> For a while, curfews set by the government prevented stores from staying open during evening business hours, further reducing their sales.<sup>119</sup> Grocers also felt that the government did not regulate unfair insurance practices. Large and small grocers inside the city were required to pay an expensive premium, otherwise, there wouldn't be insurance coverage. Because of the high costs, many smaller stores tight with cash did not have insurance policies. Businesses felt that they should be reimbursed for their losses, but were only offered long-term loans.<sup>120</sup> For those that had insurance, they still sustained major losses and had to be patient for their returns.<sup>121</sup> Esan Sarafa, a recently immigrated Chaldean who owned Tiny Tom Market, a grocery store on 12<sup>th</sup> Street, was one of the victims. Unable to afford insurance because of multiple break-ins before the riots, he estimated a loss of about \$75,000.<sup>122</sup> Joseph George, who owned a

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>118</sup> "The Morning After," *Food Dealer*, August, 1967.

<sup>119</sup> Bean, "Burn, Baby, Burn," 175.

<sup>120</sup> Edward Deeb, "Aid for Businessmen?" *Food Dealer*, August, 1967.

<sup>121</sup> Peter J. Kiron Jr., "Insurance Looms as Major Retailer Problem," *Food Dealer*, August, 1967.

<sup>122</sup> John Reiter, "Chaldean Merchants Hard-Hit," *Detroit Free Press*, July 26, 1967.

larger store called Food Farm, said: “We’re lucky ones. We were partly insured. Most of the people couldn’t get insurance at all.” He was partially reimbursed for over \$100,000 in losses.<sup>123</sup> A report done by the AFD proved that most grocers were financially in trouble due to lack of insurance:

“Roughly, about one-fourth of the riot-damaged stores had over 80% of their property insured. Another quarter had partial insurance protection, and the remaining half had very little or no insurance coverage whatsoever. Retailers attributed the reasons for this dismal situation to either the “unavailability of insurance coverage” ... or if available, “exorbitant premiums had to be paid to get insurance.”<sup>124</sup>

Insurance was the most important concern between grocers and the government.

In January 1968 – six months after the riots took place – the AFD testified before the Michigan Legislature to study the availability of property insurance coverage for sub-standard and riot-torn areas. It provided the legislature with reports of insurance problems, and problematic developments following the riots. Neighborhood groups, instead of crime, prevented the grocers from rebuilding, and the City of Detroit unnecessarily placed freezes on building permits in “high-risk” areas, stalling construction and development efforts.<sup>125</sup> More grocery store windows were either completely blocked out or protected with iron bars. Many businesses hired private police officers for protection. To add injury to insult, the shopping cart ordinance was never removed. Grocers were still required to pay \$5 to retrieve carts found by public servants, even though at least \$300,000 worth of shopping carts were never returned to their stores in Detroit. The cost of each shopping cart to the grocer was approximately \$35.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> “AFD Testifies Before Insurance Committee,” *Food Dealer*, February, 1968.

<sup>125</sup> “AFD Testifies Before Insurance Committee.”

<sup>126</sup> Edward Deeb, “Bascarts A Go-Go,” *Food Dealer*, February, 1968.

Grocers and other retailers hurt by the riots were also disappointed by The Kerner Commission and Small Business Administration. The Kerner Commission, established by an executive order to understand the causes of the 1967 race riots across the United States and provide measures to prevent another future riot, often placed blame on the merchants. The accusation of “price gouging” and an image that the merchant did not care about the neighborhood may have directly influenced the Small Business Administration’s assistance. The Small Business Administration only approved low-interest, long-term “disaster loans,” instead of financial aid.<sup>127</sup> Before securing disaster loans, business-owners had to prove they depleted liquid assets and other commercial credit. Businesses that were uninsured during the riots – such as Sarafa’s – were unqualified. Liquor stores were also unqualified for disaster loans.<sup>128</sup>

It became clear that Detroit was not a place to do business. Insurance companies, government, neighborhood groups – the city, it seemed, was out to get businesses. Those who could leave, took off immediately. Those who could not, remained and continued to rebuild. The majority of Chaldeans remained.<sup>129</sup>

When the influx of new Chaldeans arrived in Detroit after the introduction of The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, they were faced with interesting economic opportunities. The new 1965 immigration law enforced the removal of a cap on immigration that originally limited each Asian country to up to 100 immigrants, allowing

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<sup>127</sup> Bean, “Burn, Baby, Burn,” 179.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 180.

more Chaldeans to settle into the United States.<sup>130</sup> The automotive industry in Detroit was not as strong as it had been in earlier years, besides, industry did not always favor Middle-Eastern immigrants anyways. The new Chaldeans arriving were similar to earlier immigrants in many ways, for instance, most of them lacked proper knowledge of the English language, and they had easy access to working in large grocery markets or small convenience stores. Many were educated, with professional jobs back in Iraq. The 1967 riots did not discourage Chaldeans from entering Detroit, because there was still the community and cultural incentive: there was already an established Chaldean-Catholic diocese, the ethnic-occupation engulfed in the various grocery businesses, and more importantly – relatives. In the 1970s, Chaldeans, arrived *en masse* and most of them were immediately hired into working at relative-owned grocery and liquor stores.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, the flight of the white and middle-class black population towards the suburbs drained the city of Detroit of their tax base. This can be reflected in the Census results: from 1960 to 1970, Detroit lost a total of 158, 662 residents.<sup>132</sup>

<b>Table 2: Population of Detroit, 1920-1990</b>		
<b>Decade</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Change</b>
1920	993,078	
1930	1,568,662	+ 57.9%
1940	1,623,452	+ 3.5%
1950	1,849,568	+ 13.9%

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<sup>130</sup> Charles Spurlock and Raymond V. Liedka, “The Near East Family: Organized for Business?” *Sociological Perspectives* 56, no. 2 (2013): 244.

<sup>131</sup> Mary C. Sengstock, “Iraqi Christians in Detroit: An Analysis of an Ethnic Occupation,” in *Arabic Speaking Communities in American Cities*, ed. Barbara Aswad (New York: Center for Migration Studies 1974), 26.

<sup>132</sup> Refer to Table 2. Table compiled with U.S. Census information organized by decade on several webpages. Accessed on 2/12/2017, [https://www.census.gov/history/www/through\\_the\\_decades/fast\\_facts/1920\\_fast\\_facts.html](https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/fast_facts/1920_fast_facts.html).

1960	1,670,144	+ 9.7%
1970	1,511,482	- 9.3%
1980	1,203,339	- 20.5%
1990	1,027,974	- 14.6%

As most of the property and business-owners were not able to receive proper compensation from the government for their losses, they decided to get out of the situation and sell for cheap. The Jewish community, already well established in the cities of Oak Park, West Bloomfield, and nearby suburbs, had virtually disappeared from residential Detroit neighborhoods by 1975.<sup>133</sup> While many of their businesses were located in areas away from the riots, their total losses amounted to about \$20 million, and their businesses on the west side of the city were subject to further crime and devaluation.<sup>134</sup> Chaldeans, who historically purchased properties and businesses from the Jewish community, continued to make purchase and expand their footprint in the city.<sup>135</sup> Chaldeans also purchased from other business and property owners who were willing to sell – including Blacks, Italians, and other Middle Eastern people – at what was described as “fire sale rates.”<sup>136</sup>

While many business owners felt forced to leave to prevent the loss of even more capital, most of the Chaldeans decided to stay for reasons that benefitted incoming

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<sup>133</sup> Barry Stiefel, *The Jewish Community of Metro Detroit: 1945-2005* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 41.

<sup>134</sup> “Jewish Property Losses in Detroit Rioting Estimated at \$20 Million,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency News Bulletin*, July 26, 1967.

<sup>135</sup> “Revolutionary Changes in Riot-Torn Areas,” *Detroit Jewish News*, April 5, 1968.

<sup>136</sup> Bean, “Burn, Baby, Burn,” 180.

immigrants and their pursuit of self-employment.<sup>137</sup> Owning a grocery business was still appealing for the current community, because it allowed them to immediately hire incoming immigrants who were family members, and because there was still economic opportunity in owning the stores. Chaldean-owned stores did not have to hire union workers like many of the large supermarket chains, and the majority of Chaldean-owned enterprises were owner-operated. Children grew with the store, sometimes working for free all the way until they entered their professional careers:

I started working for my father as soon as he had a store, even though I was very young. While I did not know much, I still went in and put things on the shelf or arrange the bottles for pickup. So that was typical; I was not unusual. All Chaldean kids were expected to help in the family business. In very traditional families, the children do not receive money for working in the store. For example, in my family, I never drew a paycheck because I did not need it. I would never take money from my family. I always maintained my own job, so I had my own money. And my family's money was for my dad.<sup>138</sup>

Family working in stores was very important, because finding employment in the innercity was becoming increasingly difficult. Detroit did not become an ideal place to work, contributing to hardships of grocers who did not have low-cost, or even free help from family members. For these reasons, Chaldean store ownership continued to rise, while others fled the city to do business elsewhere. When borrowing money became a problem, the community had an established answer, which was later supported by funding from the federal government.

Chaldean immigration continued into the city during the 1970s and beyond, and they became owner-operators through buying vacant real-estate or destroyed businesses for pennies on the dollar, as well as getting loans from community members or their

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<sup>137</sup> Ola Marie Smith, Roger Y.W. Tang, and Paul San Miguel, "Arab-American Entrepreneurship in Detroit, Michigan," *American Journal of Business* 27, no. 1 (2012): 58.

<sup>138</sup> Spurlock and Liedka, "The Near East Family," 244.

immediate families.<sup>139</sup> The first source of capital Chaldeans sought was the immediate family, and many successfully opened businesses through loans from multiple family members.<sup>140</sup> This type of kin-network was important for expansion of Chaldean markets and provided continued opportunities for incoming immigrants during the 1970s and 1980s. The way family lending worked was simple: a prospective store owner would seek out immediate family and established relatives for a low-interest or zero-interest loan, in small amounts. These could be amounts as small as \$1,000 from twenty or thirty family members, enough for a down payment on the business with sufficient money leftover for inventory expenses and operating costs. In most cases, the store ownership was not done by one individual, but brothers or even cousins.<sup>141</sup> Joe Sarafa recalled how he bought and successfully managed his first party store in 1975 with a focus on labor and hard work: “How I got started, my father took a second mortgage on his home. I worked my butt off, 90 hours a week. My family was wonderfully supportive. My sister would hire a babysitter and then come down and work for me for free. That’s the kind of support system it takes. You can’t make it any other way.”<sup>142</sup>

Most Chaldeans sought members of the family to open businesses together. This tight-knit approach to ownership also gave the partnership more credence when asking for loans, as relatives understood that the owner-operated business would be risked by two relatives. Since the relatives who were asked for money were most likely already

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<sup>139</sup> Smith, “Arab-American Entrepreneurship,” 67.

<sup>140</sup> Yasmeen S. Hanoosh, “The Politics of Minority Chaldeans between Iraq and America” (PhD diss., University of Michigan: 2008), 174.

<sup>141</sup> Gary, “Behind Bulletproof Glass,” 155.

<sup>142</sup> John Gallagher, “Chaldeans Find Success in Retail Support System,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 17, 1992.

involved in a partnership with their own brothers or cousins, they would happily loan funds to help the newer arrivals get started. An example of the Chaldean sentiment to offer lending for relatives can be understood through an interview with a community leader:

I don't think I know of anyone that's gone into business that hasn't borrowed large sums of money from their relatives and friends. That money is given to them without any form of collateral, no notes, no interest, and paid back. And the only prerequisite for that is, you know, you work hard. And when they do pay them back, then they're obligated to help others. You know, a lot of nationalities come to me and say, "How come the Chaldeans and Arab people are so successful?" . . . It's because of their work ethics. Because of their family relationships. Because they help each other. I can show you where it's not uncommon for ten, twelve people to loan someone five hundred, a thousand, five thousand dollars. You know, and when they have it they pay it back. And then they help someone else. But that progression started right from day one and it just continued and it's still going on.<sup>143</sup>

When there were not multiple family members available to provide small loans that could accumulate to a favorable amount, there were well-known members of the community who would be willing to loan through less secure means. Two of these people were Michael George and Jack Najor. While it's difficult to determine the scope of loans made by these men before they established their own investment companies, the consensus within the community was that both men could be reached for a personal credit line.<sup>144</sup> Many Chaldeans openly said in interviews that these men would loan them money, and Michael George was even called "The Chaldean Godfather" for his generous loaning practices.<sup>145</sup> There were several reasons why loans through members in the community

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>144</sup> John Gallagher, "The Chaldean Godfather," *Detroit Free Press*, April 25, 1988.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.



were successful: failure of recent immigrants to obtain credit lines from traditional banks, the kinship network, and lucrative profit margins for the lenders.

A large number of Chaldeans who entered the United States did not have an established credit history or a lot of money. Some who left Iraq spent time in other countries, waiting for their approval to enter the United States, depleting any savings from the homeland. Even those who were educated and held professional occupations in Iraq, including doctors, engineers, and lawyers, were forced to re-certify through years of additional schooling by completing entire degree programs. For many, the funds were simply not available, and operating a grocery store seemed like a much better opportunity than restarting university in a foreign language. The problem arose when seeking finance: the immigrants simply did not have sufficient proof of credit history, or a lot of collateral. If established family members could not provide loans, then community lenders were sought. Lenders like Michael George and Jack Najor were already involved in the grocery store business, either by operating a liquor store, grocery market, or line of dairy products.

Michael George's family came to the United States in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the earliest Chaldean families to arrive from Iraq. His father owned a small grocery market and since 1942, Michael began working at the ripe age of nine doing menial tasks such as cleaning, mopping, and stocking the store shelves with inventory.<sup>146</sup> Not too long after, his dad began a dairy distribution line in 1950, called

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<sup>146</sup> Norman Sinclair and Laurie Bennett, "Businessmen Built Loyalties Among Customers," *Detroit Free Press*, February 2, 1992.

Tom George & Sons.<sup>147</sup> Originally, it did not do well enough and the business was scrapped. But Michael, who continued assisting the family business as a meat-cutter and additional management and operational responsibilities, wanted to revive and grow the company. The new business model distributed another companies milk products – Wilson’s – to three accounts, all operated by Michael. Early growth for the distribution line was slow, as there were around 150 dairy companies, and most of the sales were to relatives of Michael who owned stores.<sup>148</sup> Just a few years later, Michael was drafted into the Korean War, returning to Detroit in 1955. After he returned, Tom George & Sons expanded rapidly, under the direction of himself and his brother Sharkey. Sales grew to over 100 accounts, and in 1962, Tom George & Sons incorporated to become Melody Distributing Company, and with it came the re-branding of the Wilson’s Dairy products to Mellow-D.<sup>149</sup>

According to Michael, his dad was committed to opening a milk-delivery business because of the effects of the Great Depression, stating that “My father said to me you have two choices – you can go into the bread business or the milk business because during the Depression, people were poor and always needed milk and bread.”<sup>150</sup> This advice proved invaluable not only to Michael’s career, but to the Chaldean community. With intensive competition in the dairy distribution markets and a multitude of companies to choose from, the real winners from the heavy competition – besides the

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<sup>147</sup> “Milking It, Dairy Field Magazine, April 2001” accessed on 1/20/2017, <http://georgeco.com/milking-it-dairy-field-magazine-april-2001/>.

<sup>148</sup> Norman Sinclair and Laurie Bennett, “Businessmen Built Loyalties Among Customers,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 2, 1992.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Vanessa Denha Garmo, “80 Years Old, by George!” *Chaldean News*, January, 2013.

consumer – was the store owner. The competition required the distribution companies to be innovative in their marketing to consumers to create demand, merchandising for the stores, and low-inventory costs. Delivery was also a requirement, and establishing strong relationships with store owners was fundamental to success. Even in the beginning, Tom George remained loyal to the current brand he carried in his own store, called Family Dairy, and did not want to switch to Michael’s line of products. It was not until Michael began to perform poorly in sales, using the walk-in cooler inside of the family grocery store to leave surplus product.<sup>151</sup> Eventually, his father Tom decided it was unacceptable to let the milk expire and go to waste, and sold Wilson’s Dairy in his own store instead of Family Dairy.<sup>152</sup>

The family network provided important connections for the early stages of Tom George & Sons as a distributor for another company, but relatives were also the foundation of future expansion. Expanding the company to over 100 accounts was due to the Chaldean network of owner-operated stores at the time, which was about 120 total stores in 1962.<sup>153</sup> Having grocery stores that were owner-operated by relatives made starting a product line easier, and many wholesalers and distributors sought to recruit Chaldeans as salesman because of their growing network.<sup>154</sup> However, sometimes loyalty trumped the network, and members in the community wanted to remain with their current distributors, as in the case of Tom George. But, loyalty was not the largest issue for

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<sup>151</sup> “Rising to the Top, Michigan: The Magazine of the Detroit News, June 12, 1988.” accessed 1/20/2017, <http://georgeco.com/rising-to-the-top-michigan-the-magazine-of-the-detroit-news-june-12-1988/>.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan*, 36.

<sup>154</sup> Norman Sinclair and Laurie Bennett, “Businessmen Built Loyalties Among Customers,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 2, 1992.

expansion at the time. Many of the distributors did more than provide product lines, they also provided credit lines and loans to the store owners.

As previously explained, by 1960, most of the capital available to open grocery markets came from relatives, or inter-generational wealth. Several Chaldean families had multiple stores during this time, providing for easier opportunities to open liquor stores and grocery markets. Newer Chaldean arrivals who were not able to tap into the family wealth relied on loans from relatives or other connections in the community. Most banks were not comfortable providing loans to those without a strong credit history or collateral, and many Chaldeans avoided banks as their primary choice for loans.<sup>155</sup> In many cases, the distributors were part of the package, as they provided loans to merchants and credit lines to carry their products, leaving one less expense for the aspiring store owner.

Michael George saw this as a crucial factor that prevented his distribution line from expanding:

For a long time, the only business I could get was from my relatives who had stores. What I learned out on the street was that the big dairies made it a practice to lend money to the merchants who took their products. That tied the merchant to the dairy that helped him, and I couldn't compete with that. I went to my father and mother and we talked it all over, and he mortgaged his house for \$6,500 to help me get going. That meant I could at least offer merchants what they were getting from the other dairy companies. Until 1962, I worked on the milk route seven days a week.<sup>156</sup>

After restructuring his business model, the loaning to store owners began. The loans greatly expanded the Mello-D product reach, growing the company enough to eventually support its own product line. In 1975, Melody Distributing Company launched

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<sup>155</sup> Henrich, *Why Humans Cooperate*, 101.

<sup>156</sup> "Rising to the Top, Michigan: The Magazine of the Detroit News, June 12, 1988." accessed 1/20/2017, <http://georgeco.com/rising-to-the-top-michigan-the-magazine-of-the-detroit-news-june-12-1988/>

the Melody Farms line, containing the label on a variety of products: milk, ice cream, and other dairy essentials.<sup>157</sup>

Besides providing loans to existing merchants that would ensure the subscription to their product lines, the company raised enough funds to privately loan to potential store owners. Chaldeans immigration to the United States rose rapidly during the late 1960s and 1970s, leading to the need for more loans that traditional banking models wouldn't provide. With political turbulence in Iraq at the time, a strong metropolitan-Detroit economy, and a tight network that existed in the region, Chaldeans continued to settle in Detroit. Many of these Chaldeans had families that were providing support for small-businesses, but when the money was unavailable in the immediate family, community leaders like Michael George provided a helping hand, usually with interest that competed with the market rates. The methods of loaning in this manner were far from traditional, and Michael did it without support from the banks:

when our dairy business was still young, we went to Detroit Bank & Trust for a loan. We told them we had X dollars out on loan to our customers, and they said 'Let us see the notes.' We told them we didn't have notes. They said, 'You gotta have notes.' We never did get that loan. I think they finally decided we weren't their kind of businessmen because their kind have notes.<sup>158</sup>

This resulted in providing lots of trust in the Chaldean community that were given loans. These loans were primarily done without the extensive paperwork of a traditional loan, and were guaranteed by a simple handshake between the two parties. Those who received loans were Chaldeans who were connected to Michael George through others in

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<sup>157</sup> "Milking It, Dairy Field Magazine, April 2001" accessed on 1/20/2017, <http://georgeco.com/milking-it-dairy-field-magazine-april-2001/>.

<sup>158</sup> "Rising to the Top, Michigan: The Magazine of the Detroit News, June 12, 1988." accessed 1/20/2017, <http://georgeco.com/rising-to-the-top-michigan-the-magazine-of-the-detroit-news-june-12-1988/>.

the community, and their promise to repay the loans was secured through those who referred them. The only background check done was on the family name, which they knew in the community, and what their occupation was in Iraq. It was also understood that with the loans provided, the store would be owner-operated, and the bulk of employment would be done by family members.

This model of self-employment, kin-network, community loaning, and keeping the grocery store a family-run, ethnic-occupation, continued for years. Chaldean immigration increased in the 1980s due to continued political strife in Iraq. Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party forcefully took over the Iraqi government in the late 1970s, leading Iraq into war with Iran in 1980. With a burgeoning Chaldean community, immigrants were encouraged and welcomed to come to America, with an expectation that employment would be available in the relative's store.<sup>159</sup> Historically, problems repeated in the realm of race-relations. From their earliest stores up to 1980, almost 40 Chaldeans were killed at their place of business, and some business-owners fought back, killing customers.<sup>160</sup> Other issues, such as not hiring locals, antagonized the neighborhoods where Chaldeans had stores.<sup>161</sup> The problems and accusations were almost identical to Jewish-owned grocery stores earlier in the century, but this time around, the grocery store was more than just a way to make a living. The city was still declining economically, Chaldean immigration was still increasing, and the grocery was in every way, a type of social cohesion. Many Chaldean stores responded to the problems by installing

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<sup>159</sup> Henrich, *Why Humans Cooperate*, 85.

<sup>160</sup> Ben Johnson, "Sorting the City's Chaldean-Black Clash," *Detroit Free Press*, September 1, 1980.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

bulletproof glass to protect their workers, and hiring more people from the neighborhood.<sup>162</sup>

The failure of chain grocery markets inside the city of Detroit also accelerated Chaldean ownership of the grocery stores. Chain grocery stores faced the same problems of Chaldean-owned stores, such as high crime and operating costs, and low profit-margins. Chain grocery stores were also unable to find larger parcels of land to build during the 1970s, forcing them to look towards the suburbs.<sup>163</sup> Being able to build in the suburbs – where the population was heading – encouraged many chains to settle there. Labor unrest also sparked problems, as most employees of chain stores were unionized. Buying habits within the city of Detroit also created problems for chain stores to stay profitable, such as: the lack of business in the latter half of the month due to imbalanced customer spending of food stamps, higher security costs in the city, and frequent visits by customers while spending less money.<sup>164</sup>

Due to economic reasons, the departure of chain stores was in full-effect by mid-1970. Many popular chains began to shutter their stores, including: Chatham, Kroger, Great Scott, and A&P.<sup>165</sup> Farmer Jack, a chain that began in Detroit, was forced to buy-out 800 full-time employees that went on strike in Detroit on August 17, 1987, costing \$12.9 million dollars.<sup>166</sup> By 1990, they would only have 11 stores in Detroit, the last

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<sup>162</sup> Henrich, *Why Humans Cooperate*, 84.

<sup>163</sup> Cecilia Deck, “‘Suburbs are Easier’ for Chains, Expert Says,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 18, 1991.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> “Merger Came after Borgman’s Big Losses,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 19, 1989.

surviving chain.<sup>167</sup> Just two years earlier, there were 13 stores.<sup>168</sup> Chaldeans gladly took these chain stores off their hands, opening their own independent grocery markets.

Jerry Rabban, a 24-year old Chaldean entrepreneur, explained why he risked buying a shuttered A&P supermarket in 1980: “I decided with five brothers and five sisters, we could run a good family business. Family comes in handy when you can cut payroll from 11 percent of sales to five percent.”<sup>169</sup> Although it wasn’t mentioned, it’s likely Rabban received his loan from a relative. After a Kroger shuttered the same year, Samir Danou, a 36-year old Chaldean decided to buy, making it his second Kroger purchase in Detroit. The article writer describes how he’ll prosper: “He’ll make a profit by working 15 hours six days a week, nine hours on the seventh and by hiring help willing to work for non-union wages. Some of those helpers, no doubt, will be other Chaldeans – Christian Arabs who have migrated from Iraq to Detroit and now operate 200 or more of the city’s grocery stores.”<sup>170</sup>

By 1983, Chaldean ownership in businesses grew to significant numbers: 80% of the 1400 independent grocery markets, “a handful of wholesale firms,” and one of the largest dairies (Melody Farms).<sup>171</sup> Kroger shut down all their Detroit stores by 1984.<sup>172</sup> Out of the 248 grocery stores in Detroit in 1990, at least 237 were independently owned,

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Susan Watson, “Break in Food Chain May Occur with Sale,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 14, 1988.

<sup>169</sup> “Inner-city Groceries Become Cleanup Target,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 10, 1980.

<sup>170</sup> Larry Werner, “Grocery Chains Out, Chaldeans In,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 29, 1980.

<sup>171</sup> “Grocery Business is a Blessing and a Curse for Chaldean Community,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1983.

<sup>172</sup> Deck, “Suburbs are Easier’ for Chains.”



mostly by Chaldeans. Throughout the metropolitan area, the total amount of convenience and grocery stores was 2000, more than any other group in the region.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Jeffrey S. Ghannam, "Running the Store: Devotion Prevails," *Detroit Free Press*, October 18, 1990.

## VIII.

### Conclusion

The Chaldean story in Detroit is interchangeable with other immigrant groups in the United States, particularly the Korean immigrants in Los Angeles. Like the Chaldeans, the Koreans worked in undesirable areas, selling goods produced by a well-established majority to an impoverished minority, Black population. As a middleman minorities, both Chaldeans and Koreans in their respective cities are one of few ways for large corporations to sell their items to minority customers.<sup>174</sup> Similar to the 1943 Detroit Race Riots that devastated the Jewish population, and the 1967 Race Riots that left hundreds of Chaldean businesses destroyed, Koreans too dealt with a destructive riot in 1992 Los Angeles.<sup>175</sup> These groups, in addition to experiencing violence and difficult business conditions, also dealt with boycotts and killings against their communities by their own customers. While these groups are concentrated in small business and self-employment, in addition to having strong social cohesion in their communities, they were forced into a future of self-employment due to disadvantages in the local labor market.<sup>176</sup>

Chaldeans, exhibiting middleman minority characteristics, rose to majority ownership in the grocery markets in Detroit for a variety of reasons. First, they were obligated to pursuit self-employment because of disadvantages in the labor market due to

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<sup>174</sup> Pyong-Gap Min and Andrew Kolodny, "The Middleman Minority Characteristics of Korean Immigrants in the United States," *Korea Journal of Population and Development* 23, no. 2 (December 1994): 179.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

unfair hiring practices, language barrier, and educational conflicts. As merchants in Iraq, they were familiar with the grocery markets, allowing for easier transition into the occupation. Through an established network with earlier Middle Eastern immigrant groups – Jews and Syrian-Lebanese – who also sought self-employment due to early employment disadvantages, Chaldeans became accustomed to the grocery business, purchased stores, and expanded. Poor race relations and the destruction of the 1943 Race Riots forced Jewish and White merchants to sell their inner-city businesses, many that were purchased by Chaldeans.

By the 1967 riots, Chaldeans expanded rapidly throughout the inner city and other parts of Detroit due to their work ethic, kin-network of cheap labor and access to capital through the community. Although Chaldeans absorbed the largest capital losses during the riots, they continued to purchase and invest in the city, coinciding with the 1965 Immigration reforms that heavily increased Chaldean immigration. Political strife in the Middle East and economic opportunity in the United States accelerated Chaldean immigration during the 1960s and 1970s, while investing in more grocery and liquor stores provided newer immigrants and relatives with a place to work, as well as continued cheap labor for the business-owners. Problematic insurance policies and an unstable business environment drove many business and property owners to sell at a loss in the years following the 1967 riots; in response, the Chaldeans purchased. Requiring cheap, non-union labor with long working hours to turn a profit, large chain-stores were forced to sell and relocate to the suburbs, while Chaldeans continued to buy and expand. Continuing this pattern through the 1980s, the Chaldeans emerged as the majority owner in the grocery markets in the city of Detroit by 1990.



## VIII.

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