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The Dialectical Structures of Political Fragmentation, Social Stratification, and Economic Decline: The Tragedy of Post War Detroit

This paper explores some of the potentially dialectical relationships that appear to be operating between the changing political geography of the Detroit Metropolitan region and the accelerating rates of social segregation, stratification, and material decline that have increasingly come to define the area through the course of the post-war era.

Essentially, the paper shows that the structure of Detroit's political geography, which has been marked by the proliferation of ever more distinct localities, has tended to intensify the very social, political, and material forces that have been so important to the construction of the region's political structure.

In short, this paper advances the position that in Metropolitan Detroit, at the very least, place matters, where place is understood essentially as a politically constructed and politically effective system of increasingly numerous and distinct localities. This is especially the case when it comes to the region's intensifying structures of social stratification and segregation, along with the material decline that is presently spreading well beyond the boundaries of the region's urban core.

Since this paper advances the view that the decline of the region's economic fortunes, along with the intensification of other social challenges that are affecting the area, is incomprehensible outside of the context of the region's fragmented metropolitan political structure, the case is made for addressing the fragmentation of the area as an essentially significant problem that has the potential to determine the very sustainability of the region.

In so far as Detroit is representative of urban America as a whole, the American economic enterprise is, ultimately, dependent upon the ability of urban policy-makers throughout the nation to address the structures of metropolitan political fragmentation that define and divide their regions respectively.

This paper will explore the structures of urban fragmentation and decline in Detroit principally through a longitudinal analysis of the political, economic, and social structures of Detroit's metropolitan geography, using aggregate contextual and electoral data drawn from the Bureau of the Census and locally tabulated national election returns. The paper will also draw national comparisons, as data from the author's Detroit Electoral Study will be compared to preliminary information gathered for the Metroamerica Votes and Urban Cultural Survey

Project, which will eventually include the Detroit Election Study and which has been proposed and begun by scholars working out of the Global Urban Studies Program, at Michigan State University. This work will be facilitated especially by the application of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology.