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PUBLIC AFFAIRS PAMPHLETS

WHY RACE RIOTS?

Lessons from Detroit

BY EARL BROWDER

What happened in Detroit
—and Why?

How your community can
avoid similar disturbances

PUBLIC AFFAIRS PAMPHLETS
No. 87 1944

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WHY RACE RIOTS?

By EARL BROWN

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ON Sunday, June 20, 1943, one of the most serious race riots in American history broke out in the city of Detroit. Before it was brought under control some thirty hours later, twenty-five Negroes and nine white persons were killed and property worth several hundreds of thousands of dollars had been destroyed.

The forces which led to the outbreak in that city exist, to a greater or lesser degree, in most of our cities. Similar outbreaks have occurred elsewhere. A study of the factors leading to the outbreak in Detroit is important because it can show us how to avoid similar outbreaks, not only in Detroit, but in other cities.

Earl Brown, formerly a special correspondent for the New York *Herald Tribune,* is on the editorial staff of *Life*. He has made several trips to Detroit both before and after the riot of June, 1943. He is co-author of another Public Affairs Pamphlet, *The Negro and the War.*

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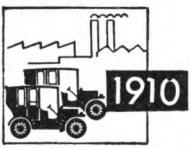
POPULATION GROWTH OF DETROIT



1900 TO 1910
AUTOMOBILE PRODUCTION UP FROM 4,000 TO 200,000



1910 TO 1920
PRODUCTION UP TO 2,000,000



1920 TO 1930
PRODUCTION EXCEEDS 5,000,000



1930 TO 1940
NO INCREASE IN PRODUCTION



1940 TO 1943
WAR PRODUCTION



Each symbol represents 100,000 people.

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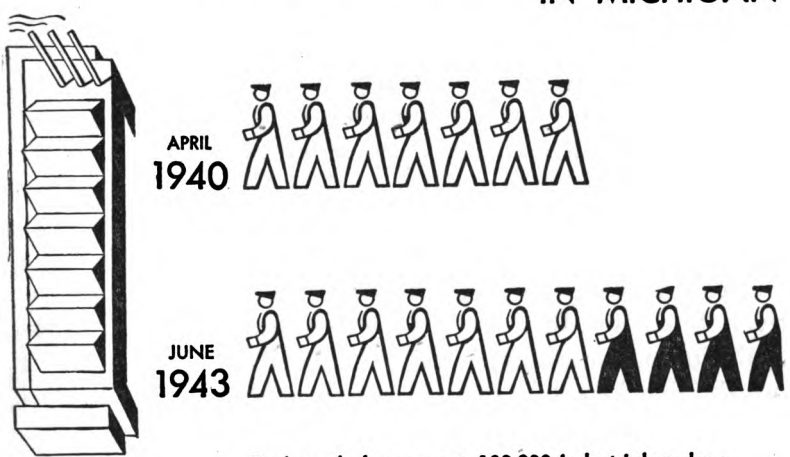
which included several murders, arson, the bombing of Father Coughlin's house and the Workers Book Store as well as the homes of a number of labor organizers. An investigation by a grand jury resulted in the listing of eighty-six persons as members of the Legion. In this list were found the names of a member of the state legislature, the manager of the state sales tax, a city treasurer, sheriffs, and other officials.

GROWTH IN INDUSTRIAL EMPLOYMENT IN MICHIGAN



Each symbol represents 100,000 industrial workers

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By the middle 30's, Detroit had a representation of every kind of panacea, political nostrum, and agitation. There were the Anglo-Saxon Federation and an anti-Negro organization called the National Workers League. But the most steady, day-in and day-out exhortation came from the sensational preachers. Of these the best known are the Reverend J. Frank Norris and the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith. Norris was born in Alabama and has held pulpits in a number of Southern towns. He was an energetic politician and brought his brimstone gospel clear to

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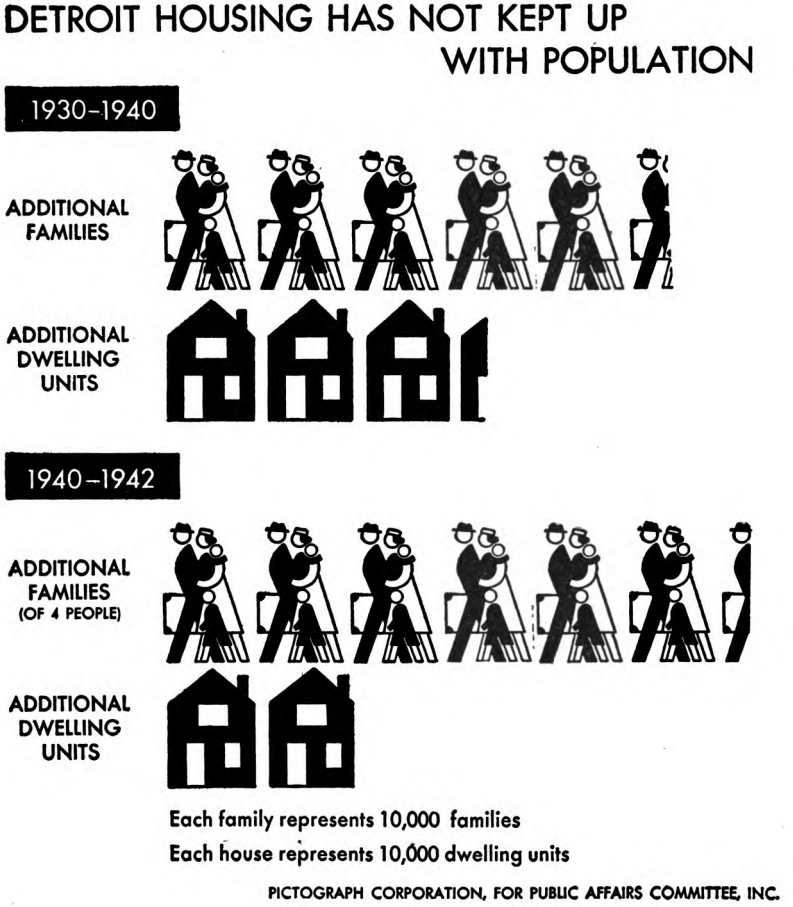

Side—live most of Detroit's Negroes. Almost everybody now has plenty of war wages to pay for lodging, but decent houses simply do not exist. The only recourse the Negroes have is to cram themselves into the filthy valley tenements.

The explanation of Paradise Valley may be found partly in the fact that public housing has never roused much enthusiasm in Detroit as an issue. The ups and downs of the city's growth paralleled the ups and downs in automobile manufacture. They were accompanied by alternate real estate booms and deflations. During the

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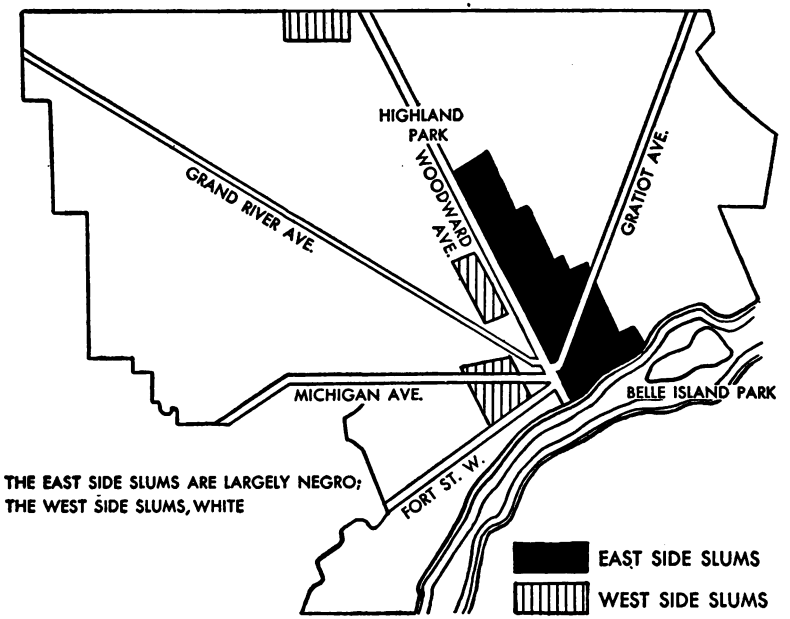
THE COST OF SLUMS IN DETROIT



INFANT MORTALITY

PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS, 1930



DETROIT AS A WHOLE	64.7
EAST SIDE SLUMS	122
WEST SIDE SLUMS	79.5

TUBERCULOSIS DEATH RATE

PER 100,000 POPULATION, 1930-38



DETROIT AS A WHOLE	82.7
EAST SIDE SLUMS	418
WEST SIDE SLUMS	126

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HOW TO LESSEN RACIAL TENSION



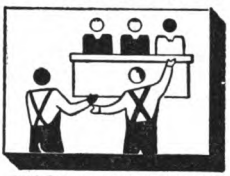
BETTER HOUSING



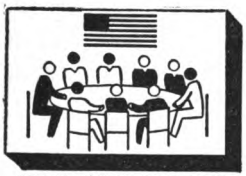
LEARNING DEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR – IN SCHOOL, CHURCH, CIVIC GROUP



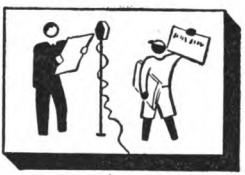
FIRMNESS & UNDERSTANDING, BY EMPLOYERS



DISCIPLINARY ACTION BY UNIONS



FEDERALLY SPONSORED CITIZEN COMMITTEES



COOPERATION BY PRESS AND RADIO



THOROUGH INVESTIGATION AND PROMPT ACTION IN ALL "INCIDENTS"



EFFICIENT POLICING OF NEGRO DISTRICTS



IMMEDIATE AVAILABILITY OF FEDERAL TROOPS

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