

view of his employees' contentment was soon to be challenged. Disputes over royalties and other business practices would cause several bitter estrangements within the Motown "family." These behind-the-scenes battles also accentuated the strain that Motown's business objectives put on its other goals to appear progressive and in touch with its own employees and the black struggle.

Hitsville's internal conflicts represented, of course, only one small facet of the larger challenge that faced Detroit as it began the enormous task of rebuilding itself from the ashes of 1967. Beginning in 1968 Motown, Detroit, and the country as a whole confronted an increasingly violent and divided civil rights campaign and an escalating public outcry against the United States's involvement in Vietnam. For Motown, the country's political upheavals—both in the civil rights campaign and in foreign policy—would continue to place more pressure on the record company to produce music that spoke to and engaged with these political issues. In Detroit, where the city's own civil unrest had been compared to the fighting in Southeast Asia, a new campaign to elect a black mayor began. And, as was always the case in the Motor City, these larger questions—whether race relations or Vietnam or leadership of city government—played themselves out in the city's black cultural life, which was becoming more inseparable from political ideas and social movements.⁵²

"What's Going On?"

Motown and New Detroit

On February 16, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. returned to Detroit to appear again—as he had on June 23, 1963—at Cobo Hall. He did not come to lead any "great" marches or rally the cause of civil disobedience in the face of an increasingly violent movement. King came to the Motor City in a surprise visit to participate in what Mayor Cavanagh had proclaimed "Aretha Franklin Day." Similar to Langston Hughes Day in 1964, Aretha Franklin Day was a citywide celebration of black life that coincided with Black History Month and Detroit's Brotherhood Week. In 1968 the cultural extravaganza acquired more significance in the wake of Detroit's turbulent summer of the past year. Mayor Cavanagh and other city officials were eager to support an event that could promote their vision of New Detroit—a city wounded, but not defeated, by racial division; a city, in other words, capable of recognizing the talents and hopes of black Detroit, which Aretha Franklin so powerfully represented. Franklin, who had sung in her father's New Bethel Baptist Church and toured as a child in the C. L. Franklin Gospel Caravan, had achieved local celebrity at a very young age, but, by February 1968, she was a national cultural phenomenon: the Queen of Soul.¹

By 1968 Franklin's celebrity matched and competed with that of the Supremes, but her singing style and rise to fame differed dramatically from Detroit's prize trio. Aretha first broke with her gospel roots in 1960 at the age of eighteen, when she moved to New York and signed a five-year recording contract with John Hammond at Columbia Records.

Franklin's first album at Columbia, entitled simply *Aretha*, consisted of twelve songs including "Over the Rainbow" and "Rock-a-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody." Hammond produced the songs with jazz arrangements, and Franklin's vocals kept to the strictures of popular song stylings.² For the next six years Franklin's recordings for Columbia remained within the genre of popular ballads and Broadway standards, such as "If Ever I Would Leave You" from *Camelot*, and stagnated there. Ironically, the same show tunes that secured the Supremes' status as international nightclub stars almost ended Aretha Franklin's early efforts to reach a popular audience. When, by late 1965, none of the nine albums she had recorded with Columbia had shown large profits, the company released her from her contract.

In early 1966, however, Jerry Wexler, an Atlantic Records producer, approached Franklin, offered her a contract, and, when she accepted, quickly sent her to the Fame recording studio in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. The Muscle Shoals recording sessions proved to be a watershed in Aretha's singing career. Wexler encouraged Franklin to return to her unique gospel style. As he later claimed, "I took her to church, sat her down at the piano, and let her be herself." She and the studio band recorded "I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)," a song written by Ronnie Shannon that Aretha had brought from Detroit. Wexler released the record on February 10, 1967, and the song sold a quarter of a million copies within its first two weeks of release.³

Franklin's rise to the top of the charts, which occurred against a backdrop of urban revolts and protest, was never merely a record industry success story. When her hit single "Respect" climbed the charts in July 1967, some fans declared that the summer of 1967 was "the summer of 'Retha, Rap [Brown], and Revolt.'" Her songs became anthems—the soulful sound of a movement that increasingly seemed propelled by black pride and power rather than earlier "dreams" of racial integration.

Detroit's Aretha Franklin Day, held exactly one year after the smash release of "I Never Loved a Man," celebrated the singer's talents as a performer and as a symbol of black political consciousness. The Friday night gala concert at Cobo Hall demonstrated Franklin's broad appeal. Franklin received eleven different awards from local groups and record industry publications such as *Cashbox* and *Billboard*, as well as a special

award from SCLC presented by King. Local disc jockey Martha Jean "the Queen" Steinberg acted as one of the hosts of the evening and declared Aretha "everybody's soul sister." After the presentation of awards and several speeches, Franklin took to the stage to perform for her adoring fans—her first local appearance in over two years. As she sang hits including "Natural Woman" and "Respect," the audience crowded the stage, some clamoring just to touch her dress. The ABC network filmed the entire evening for a television special that it was producing on Franklin's rise to superstardom.⁵

Aretha Franklin Day, more than a celebration of the singer's talents, illustrated how much black culture had gained tangible political clout by the late 1960s. King's presence at the event attested to the rising power of cultural figures such as Franklin in the freedom struggle. The head of SCLC had traveled to Detroit to honor Franklin and to affiliate himself with her undisputed popularity and public influence. King's status as the leader of the nonviolent civil rights movement had changed markedly since his earlier appearance in Detroit at the Great March to Freedom in 1963. He faced his first major defeat in 1966 when SCLC's campaign to desegregate Chicago and fight for open housing ended with little progress and much frustration. SCLC's protest strategies, which had worked so effectively in rural southern communities, were not well suited for the intricacies and power structures of the urban North. SCLC's defeat in Chicago also coincided with the rising popularity of leaders such as Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, who advocated black nationalism and separatism—a clear challenge to all that King's leadership represented. In April 1967 King spoke out against the war in Vietnam and regained the admiration of leaders such as Carmichael, but he lost the crucial support of the Johnson administration. The SCLC leader morally opposed the Vietnam conflict and was concerned that the United States's involvement in the war was weakening support for domestic programs that could aid the poor and ameliorate race relations.⁶

King came to the Motor City for Aretha Franklin Day beleaguered by all of these concerns. His place as the undisputed leader of the civil rights struggle was not as secure as it once was—weakened both by black nationalist challenges and his break with the Johnson administration. King was also deeply troubled about the growing violence tearing at

American society, of which Detroit stood as its most devastated victim. Moreover, King's and SCLC's new project, the Poor People's Campaign, was having some difficulties gaining early, broad-based support. The campaign represented an effort to move beyond the issues of racial integration and voting rights to confront, instead, the broader concern of economic injustice, which many acknowledged as the true source of the rage that burned so many cities—including Detroit—in 1967. At the Franklin gala, King, suffering from laryngitis and exhaustion, spoke very briefly to the crowd at Cobo Hall, who greeted him with a warm standing ovation. As the civil rights movement's most powerful orator rested his voice, the Queen of Soul exercised hers. The momentary contrast between King's silence and Franklin's multioctave range embodied the shifts that were transforming the face of black struggle in America. Aretha's rendition of "Respect" was the crown jewel of her repertoire, an anthem of the dispossessed, and expressed the spirit of King's agenda as no speech could have.

"Respect"

On March 1, 1968—just a few weeks after Aretha Franklin Day—the sentiments of "Respect" and the goal of the Poor People's Campaign received validation when the federal government published the Kerner Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. The report's indictment that "our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal" corroborated King's and SCLC's belief that the civil rights struggle needed to focus its energies on the economic causes of this pandemic inequality. The findings of the Kerner Commission argued for more government programs to remedy social and economic inequality, but President Johnson did not act decisively to implement the report's recommendations.⁷ Given Johnson's reluctance, King and SCLC leaders became more certain that the Poor People's Campaign was not only necessary but urgent to keep the issues of economic injustice in the forefront of public debate.⁸

For cities like Detroit, President Johnson's reluctance to support the findings of the Kerner Commission with legislative action would have devastating repercussions for years to come. "New" Detroit had experi-

enced little recovery in terms of race relations or economic growth when the federal government released the Kerner Report. For this reason, the city was searching for any sign of economic strength or improved race relations. In mid-March 1968 Motown Records offered a glimmer of hope when the company announced that it was expanding its business "deeper into [Detroit's] inner city." Motown declared that, owing to its enormous growth, it needed to move into a larger office facility and had purchased the ten-story Donovan Building on Woodward Avenue across from the Fisher Freeway. The building would be renamed the "Motown Center" and would house close to three hundred employees. The original recording studios at Hitsville, U.S.A., would remain in operation on West Grand Boulevard, but the majority of the company's business administration would move to the new location.⁹

Detroit welcomed the news of Motown's expansion. The *Michigan Chronicle* ran a story that commended the record company for giving "many young Detroit Negroes . . . the opportunity to fill positions previously considered 'off limits' to black youths." The article continued to describe Motown's evolution into an international record industry giant. By 1968 Motown had offices in New York, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Paris, and London. Yet the newspaper release emphasized that "Berry Gordy Jr. has insisted that the nerve-cell of the ever increasing Motown activity remain in Detroit's inner city." The *Michigan Chronicle* proclaimed, moreover, that Motown's move to the Donovan Building would "play a vital role in the rebuilding of a New Detroit." The *Chronicle* proudly reported that the Motown Center "will be one of the largest buildings housing a business owned and operated by Negroes in the country."¹⁰

To some, Motown's relocation to the "inner city" breathed life into a battered city; to others, it marked the end of an era. Certain Motown loyalists felt that the company's move away from the West Grand Boulevard neighborhood that had, in many ways, created its sound was more abandonment than progress. The sterile ten-story Donovan Building shared more with the towering corporate headquarters of General Motors down the street than with homey Hitsville, U.S.A.¹¹ For city leaders, however, Motown's announcement about the Donovan expansion was, for the moment, similar to Aretha Franklin Day. Both events inspired public hope of civic rebirth. If Detroit was going to create a future of racial

harmony and economic prosperity for itself, perhaps the city's famous black artists and businesses could lead the way.

Although Aretha Franklin or Motown might inspire hope, Detroit's future was much more complicated than any song could express or any one business decision could easily remedy. From 1968 to 1973 the Motor City's struggle to create itself anew from the wreckage of 1967 involved many competing interests and ongoing debate over who could best lead the city. Many of Detroit's black citizens felt the only way to improve the city was through black political control. Detroit's black activists, buoyed by Carl Stokes's election as the mayor of Cleveland in 1967, began their early campaign to elect a black mayor.

The Motown Record Company maintained an ambivalent relationship to Detroit and black politics during these years. The company's move to the Donovan Building, though publicly presented as a gesture of commitment to Detroit's revitalization efforts, was actually the first step of the more traditional process of corporate decentralization. Hitsville, U.S.A., with its offices around the world, was becoming increasingly invested in expanding its operations in Los Angeles with the hopes of breaking into the film industry and television production. Musically, Motown confronted an internal clash between, on the one hand, the management's desire to produce music that maintained the company's popular and commercial standards and, on the other, the artists'—especially Marvin Gaye's and Stevie Wonder's—desire to produce music that was socially and politically relevant.

Artists' interest in having creative freedom to produce their own music was only one of the conflicts beginning to divide and weaken the Motown "family" in 1968. Behind the scenes, the record company was about to face the most serious challenge to its highly cultivated image as the dream of black capitalism realized. Royalty disputes instigated the crisis and brought into question the long-held belief that black capitalism was somehow more equitable toward African Americans than any other form of capitalism. Externally, the political upheavals of 1968 tested Motown Records—along with the rest of the country. On March 31, 1968, Lyndon Johnson, responding to heightened criticism of his foreign policy in Vietnam and his domestic policy on race relations, announced that he

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would not seek another term as president of the United States. The announcement startled many and inaugurated one of the country's most volatile election years. Five days later, on April 4, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. The death of the leader of the nonviolent struggle generated a wave of civil unrest and violent outbreaks in cities across the country—including Detroit. At Motown, the tragedy of King's death renewed the record company's commitment to the national black struggle and to Detroit's efforts to reinvent itself as a model city.

"I Care about Detroit"

The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. stunned the nation. King had traveled to Memphis to support a strike by the city's sanitation workers. His involvement in the strike furthered efforts to shift the focus of the civil rights struggle onto economic issues. The Memphis sanitation workers' strike revitalized the national civil rights movement and foreshadowed a new era of black labor organizing. King knew that the strike supported the goals of the Poor People's Campaign. As historian William Chafe has noted, "The call from Memphis, though on the surface a diversion of his energies, in fact spoke eloquently to the heart of his concerns. Here, class and race operated together, dramatically illustrating the principle objectives of the entire Poor People's Campaign. When King was killed, many people wondered if the campaign would continue without his leadership, but the cause of economic justice was too urgent to abandon."¹²

Plans were already under way to proceed with the Poor People's Campaign as thousands gathered in Atlanta for King's funeral. As the Reverend Ralph Abernathy proclaimed, "For any of you who linger in the cemetery and tarry around the grave, I have news for you. We have business on the road to freedom . . . We must prove to white America that you can kill the leader but you cannot kill the dream." Berry Gordy Jr. attended the funeral and pledged his continued support of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.¹³

Coretta King quickly enlisted Motown's assistance with a Poor People's March soon after the funeral. She asked Gordy if Motown artists

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Black Forum's Grammy-winning release, *Why I Oppose the War in Vietnam*, 1970. (Courtesy Motown Record Co., L.P., a Polygram Company.)

would perform a benefit concert in Atlanta in support of the campaign. Junius Griffin, who had worked so closely with King at SCLC before coming to Motown, organized the details of the concert. Within a matter of days, Gordy sent Stevie Wonder, Gladys Knight and the Pips, the Supremes, the Temptations, and a special eleven-piece Motown band to perform before more than thirteen thousand at the Atlanta Civic Center. The concert raised over \$25,000 for SCLC, which did not hesitate to express its gratitude. At the end of the performance, Ralph Abernathy and Coretta King presented Gordy with a special plaque and a set of leather-bound books of King's speeches to acknowledge his support. After the concert, Gordy and the Motown performers joined other celebrities including Harry Belafonte, Sidney Poitier, Sammy Davis Jr., and Nancy Wilson to officially inaugurate the march. Motown's assistance with the Poor People's March stood out as the company's most overtly political gesture since its recording of King's speech at Detroit's Great March to Freedom in 1963.¹⁴

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The Poor People's March was reminiscent of the Great March to Freedom in other ways as well. At the Great March King articulated some of his first public criticism of the injustices that African Americans confronted in the urban North in housing and employment discrimination. The wave of civil unrest that shocked the country during the summer of 1967 (as well as the sobering conclusions of the Kerner Report) proved that little progress had been made to meet the economic needs of many black Americans. The 1968 Poor People's March brought renewed attention to these needs and issues. And on April 11, 1968, only days after King's death, Congress passed and President Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1968. The legislation sought to expand equal employment and, most important, end housing discrimination—goals of both marches.

Motown's participation in the Poor People's Campaign generated much-needed publicity but did not guarantee its ultimate success. The Poor People's March began in Marks, Mississippi. When marchers reached Washington, D.C., on May 13, they set up an encampment known as "Resurrection City," which stood in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol. The early days of the protest were hopeful. Detroit's own Reverend C. L. Franklin traveled to Washington and preached to the demonstrators—rousing the crowd as few others could. As witness Charles Fager later recalled,

Franklin's delivery crossed the line between speaking and singing as he rose toward a crescendo, and the responses from the crowd became tumultuous and almost continuous, beyond hope of reproduction in print. The roots of his famous daughter's vocal style could be heard reverberating in his voice. At the climax he suddenly turned and sat down, leaving the crowd in mid-cheer. But it was only a flourish; he was on his feet again in a few seconds, shouting and singing to them and with them, finally leading the church in the hymn, "I'm Gonna Trust in the Lord until I Die," and then sitting down exhausted, dramatically wiping his streaming face with a large white handkerchief. It was a magnificent performance, unequaled during the campaign in brilliance of delivery or frenzy of response. It was the closest the Washington mass meetings ever came to the kind of exultation that makes a

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movement the center of a community's attention the way it was in Selma.¹⁵

Yet, in the end, the Poor People's Campaign suffered from a lack of direction, poor organization, and horrible rainy weather, which turned Resurrection City into a muddy swamp. Unexpectedly, regional tensions arose between the demonstrators from the urban North and the rural South. The SCLC organizers had not predicted, as Charlayne Hunter noted, "that poor people do not automatically respond positively to one another." The campaign officially ended when the Resurrection City organizers dismantled the settlement in late May 1968.¹⁶

Motown's participation in the Poor People's Campaign was not the only time that the record company lent its musical talents to a public cause in 1968. During the summer Motown participated in Detroit's efforts to avoid a repeat of the "long, hot summer" of 1967. The mayor, community activists, and corporate leaders wanted to prevent any situations that might lead to another summer uprising. Detroit revisited some of the unrest of July 1967 in the days immediately following King's assassination in April 1968 but quickly contained the violence and vandalism. City hall and law enforcement officials implemented new "riot control" tactics that they developed after the many mistakes of July 1967.¹⁷ But city officials wanted more preventive measures to ensure that the summer of 1968 would be peaceful. In February 1968 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded \$60,000 to Detroit's Youth Opportunity Program. The funding allowed city leaders to plan a summer program that would provide jobs, recreation, and educational projects for Detroit's young people. The United Foundation offered its financial support, and Motown agreed to assist with publicity. Organizers officially named the program "Detroit Is Happening," a variation on the "It's Happening" theme of the 1967 Torch Drive, based on the Supremes' hit single.¹⁸

The "Detroit Is Happening" program immediately received widespread support. The United Foundation, the New Detroit Committee, and the federal government, as well as private individuals, raised more than \$1 million in funds for the campaign. Motown Records produced two

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theme songs for the summer program. The first recording, "Detroit Is Happening," was an adaptation of the Supremes' hit "The Happening" and included a motivational voice-over by Willie Horton, star outfielder for the Detroit Tigers. Smokey Robinson and the Miracles recorded a second song, "I Care about Detroit," on June 28, 1968. Motown distributed both "Detroit Is Happening" and "I Care about Detroit" throughout the city as a part of the summer-long efforts to promote civic peace. Over 100,000 people bought "I Care about Detroit" buttons, bumper stickers, shopping bags, and records.¹⁹

The lyrics of "I Care about Detroit" reflected the themes of the "Detroit Is Happening" campaign. In the song's opening preface, Smokey Robinson addressed listeners with the following remarks:

There are many reasons why one cares about a city—why you care about its problems, its people and indeed its very future. Is it friendly, warm, hospitable? And are there good job opportunities, educational facilities, and a cultural center? Are you proud to call it your hometown? When you come right down to it I'd venture to say that you'd all come down to a resounding "yes!" when you are talking about Detroit, my hometown.²⁰

As the song mentions, the "Detroit Is Happening" program sought to provide "good job opportunities, educational facilities, and a cultural center" for the city's youth. The program created 30,000 summer jobs, and 30,000 students enrolled in summer school classes, with an additional 70,000 enrolled in remedial education classes. Detroit's Parks and Recreation Program launched its most ambitious summer activity schedule including "playmobiles" that transported portable play equipment to inner-city locations. In addition, 50,000 inner-city children participated in a camping program, and black arts and culture workshops taught city youth about black history and culture.²¹

Unlike the Poor People's Campaign, the "Detroit Is Happening" program ended on an optimistic note. Near the end of the summer-long effort, Mayor Cavanagh proclaimed that, "Detroit Is Happening proved—if it ever really needed proving—that Detroit is a good place to live and to work and to have fun. Many Detroiters had forgotten how the

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city was before July 23, 1967. 'Detroit Is Happening' reminded them and they, in turn, gave the city a chance to live again." Cavanagh also specifically cited Motown's participation in the program as an example of the generosity Detroiters have toward their city. In the final report on "Detroit Is Happening," organizers suggested that Motown Records might expand its participation in the program in the future: "Motown Records and the radio industry should sponsor a city-wide band and vocal competition with a recording contract as first prize."²²

Motown's contributions to "Detroit Is Happening" and to the Poor People's Campaign illustrate how the record company affiliated itself with various public causes in 1968.²³ Yet the larger objectives of these two campaigns also reveal how Motown's gestures toward "public service" were often quite contradictory. Motown's benefit concert for the Poor People's March aided SCLC's efforts to disrupt Capitol Hill and force the federal government to recognize the economic plight of America's poor. The company's recordings for "Detroit Is Happening" supported federally funded programming to prevent any such "disorder" on the streets of Detroit. In these two cases Motown used its celebrity both to support the black movement and to align itself with government programming and Detroit's white corporate establishment. The divergent objectives of these efforts reflected the tightrope that the company walked between its allegiance to the black struggle and its desire to establish itself in corporate America. The tension that these competing goals created would soon begin to erode Motown's relationship with some leaders in Detroit's black community and with its own employees. Specifically, the black labor movement, which gained momentum during the Memphis sanitation workers' strike, was starting to challenge Detroit's automobile industry. These challenges were also about to resonate at Hitsville, U.S.A., as the record company faced its first major labor dispute.

"Our Thing Is DRUM"

A distinct black labor movement emerged in Detroit during the spring of 1968. On May 2, 1968, a racially integrated group of four thousand autoworkers staged a wildcat strike at Detroit's Dodge Main plant. A recent speedup on the assembly line sparked the strike, but many long-

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term grievances also motivated the job action. The wildcat strike, which by definition started without union authorization, began as an interracial effort but soon divided along racial lines. White workers dominated the picket lines, but black workers disproportionately received disciplinary action from the Chrysler Corporation. Several black workers, including one strike leader, General G. Baker Jr., were fired.²⁴

General Baker rose to prominence as a black militant leader soon after the Great Rebellion of July 1967. He, along with a core group of about thirty activists, began publishing their own newspaper the *Inner City Voice (ICV)* in October 1967. The *ICV*, subtitled *Detroit's Black Community Newspaper* and the *Voice of Revolution*, quickly became a catalyst of black political activity. When Chrysler punished the black leaders of the wildcat strike, all of whom were active participants in the *ICV* network, they decided to form their own caucus to represent the needs of black workers. The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) was born. DRUM planned to organize workers nationally and believed that "the black working class would be the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle in this country."²⁵

The DRUM movement grew rapidly during the summer of 1968 and directly challenged the upbeat image of the "Detroit Is Happening" campaign. Organizers used the *ICV* newspaper, which had a circulation of ten thousand, to promote their cause. A front page story, published in June 1968, explicitly described the plight of the black auto worker:

black workers are tied day in and day out, 8-12 hours a day, to a massive assembly line, an assembly line that one never sees the end or the beginning of but merely fits into a slot and stays there, swearing and bleeding, running and stumbling, trying to maintain a steadily increasing pace. Adding to the severity of working conditions are the white racist and bigoted foremen, harassing, insulting, driving, and snapping the whip over the backs of thousands of black workers, who have to work in these plants in order to eke out an existence. These conditions coupled also with the double-faced, backstabbing of the UAW have driven black workers to a near uprising state. The UAW with its bogus bureaucracy is unable, has been unable, and in many cases is unwilling to press forward the demands and aspirations of black workers.²⁶

The militant style of the *Inner City Voice* appealed to workers throughout the city and inspired more labor unions in the spirit of DRUM. Over the course of several months, new organizations formed, including UPRUM (among United Parcel Service workers), HRUM (among health workers), and NEWURUM (among *Detroit News* workers). By June 1969 these locals had founded the League of Revolutionary Black Workers to unite and protect all the local RUMs.²⁷

The DRUM movement relied on cultural expression and independent forms of cultural production to communicate its political message. As mentioned in the Introduction, at one wildcat protest some DRUM activists "danced in the street" and beat bongo drums outside the Dodge Main Plant to draw attention to their cause and intimidate their opponents. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers also produced a documentary film, *Finally Got the News*, to promote their cause. In the opening sequence several autoworkers carpool to work as the blues song "Detroit, I Do Mind Dying" plays on the radio. Both the film and the music featured in the soundtrack reflected the league's creative political energy. The *Inner City Voice* newspaper also published local poetry, cartoons, original artwork, and photography to juxtapose against and enhance its written articles.²⁸

Publication of the *ICV* was never a simple task, however. The FBI attempted to stop the presses soon after the *ICV* started publishing. FBI agents visited local print shops that produced the newspaper and questioned the owners about their participation in subversive activities. Because of these tactics, the *ICV* was never printed in the same location twice; and eventually copy had to be shipped to Chicago, where it was published by the same firm that produced the Nation of Islam's *Muhammad Speaks*. The *Inner City Voice* staff faced outside resistance with determination. Their efforts to publish the newspaper emulated a long history of independent black cultural production in Detroit that ran from Joe Von Battle's recordings of the Reverend C. L. Franklin, to the Reverend Albert B. Cleage's newspaper the *Illustrated News*, Milton and Richard Henry's *Now! Magazine*, and Dudley Randall's Broadside Press.²⁹

Significantly, however, the *ICV* activists did not perceive Motown Records, Detroit's most famous black cultural producer, as a compatriot

in their struggle. In December 1967 the *ICV* ran an article entitled "How U Sound Motown" by John Cosby Jr., in which Cosby asked, "what has Motown done for the environment that put it on the map?" He continued, "if some of the better than 15 million per annum doesn't funnel back to some lay blackies, it really shouldn't matter about Motown. And talk of being a source of pride, to the serious minded, is nonsense."³⁰ The *ICV* article voiced a growing sentiment among black activists in Detroit that Hisville, U.S.A., was more interested in its own profit margins than in the fight to improve economic opportunities for everyone. Motown's international success in the record industry and its ambitions in film and television had begun to alienate the company from the community that had produced it.

The *Inner City Voice's* critique of Motown stood out against the public praise that the record company usually received. Few publications, locally or nationally, had an unkind word to say about Hitsville during the fall of 1967. In September 1967 *Fortune* magazine published a feature about Motown that praised the company as a "model" black business—just as it had praised Detroit as a model city of race relations a few years earlier. In early November Berry Gordy also received glowing local press for the Supremes' contribution to the United Foundation's Torch Drive. And, in that same month, *Jet* magazine published its press release about Motown's contributions to the United Negro College Fund, its plans for an educational record label, and—according to Gordy—his "happy" staff. With the exception of the *Inner City Voice*, all of these reports painted a convincing picture of black capitalism at its best—financially successful and yet always in touch with the betterment of the race and the common good.³¹

Back in Detroit, however, Motown's reputation continued to suffer when the company began to use aggressive business tactics to weaken its competition within the city's local recording industry. In 1968 the company bought out its major rival in Detroit, Golden World/Ric Tic Records. Eddie Wingate, owner of the popular Twenty Grand nightclub, and Joanne Jackson, a local businesswoman, founded Golden World Records in 1964. Golden World soon merged with Ric Tic Records, another local label started by LeBaron Taylor, a popular disc jockey at WCHB

radio. Golden World/Ric Tic had several major hits over the years including the Parliaments' "(I Just Wanna) Testify" and Edwin Starr's "Agent Double-O Soul." Motown's rivalry with the company ran deep. Throughout 1965 and 1966 Motown's prized studio musicians, the Funk Brothers, periodically moonlighted at Golden World/Ric Tic when the label offered to pay them union scale. At the time, Gordy sent out Mickey Stevenson, Motown's artist and repertoire director, to put an end to the late-night recording sessions, but he got final revenge when he bought out Golden World/Ric Tic for an estimated \$1 million. To some in Detroit, Motown's efforts to overtake its competition destroyed the cooperative spirit of the city's black business community, the very spirit that had made Hitsville, U.S.A., possible in the first place.³²

Outside criticism about Motown's takeover of Golden World/Ric Tic Records paralleled the beginnings of the record company's most serious internal crisis about its own labor practices. In late 1967 Motown's celebrated songwriting team of Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland—officially known as Holland-Dozier-Holland, or H-D-H—began a work slowdown to protest what they perceived as Motown's inequitable royalty system. H-D-H was without question the most successful writing collaboration Motown had ever produced. From 1963 to 1967 the trio wrote twenty-five top-ten pop records, twelve of which hit the number one spot, as well as twelve other songs that made the top-ten on the rhythm and blues chart. Some of their early successes included the Marvelettes' "Please Mr. Postman" (1961), Martha and the Vandellas' "Heatwave" (1963) and "Nowhere to Run" (1965), and Marvin Gaye's "How Sweet It Is to Be Loved by You" (1964). When H-D-H started its collaboration with the Supremes, beginning in 1964 with "Where Did Our Love Go?" they became an indispensable creative force in Motown's hit factory. H-D-H's songs perfectly matched the Supremes' singing style and polished image. The combination produced a string of number-one hits including "Baby Love," "Come See about Me," "Stop! In the Name of Love," "I Hear a Symphony," and "The Happening." By late 1967, however, Holland-Dozier-Holland had stopped writing new songs in protest. The songwriting team felt that they deserved more compensation for their role in creating the Motown sound and making it the "Sound of Young America."³³

Holland, Dozier, and Holland were not the first Motown employees to express discontent with the company's policies and minimal profit-sharing. In its early years, many of Hitsville's youngest stars were initially quite naive about the intricacies of their recording contracts. In 1964 Mary Wells left Motown in search of a better contract. As she later recalled, "I was quite young when I signed with Motown and the contract I signed paid me nothing compared to the revenue my records were bringing in for the company. My contract ran out in 1964 and when another record company offered me a much more lucrative contract, I took it. I know a lot of people feel I made a mistake but I'm glad I made the move because I was finally paid a decent salary for my work."³⁴ Also, Motown's cross-collateralization policies, in which the cost of record production was charged against artists' royalties, reduced many performers' final earnings on any song. Mary Wilson's first contract as a Supreme reflected these policies. As she recounted,

for the records sold in the United States (and not returned) I was to be paid 3 percent of 90 percent of the suggested retail price for each record, less all taxes and packaging costs. What was especially interesting about that was the 3 percent royalty applied only when I cut solo records . . . Based on my figures, this meant that as a solo artist I would get approximately 2 cents for every 75-cent single sold. So, if I or any of the other Supremes recorded a million-seller as a solo, that person's net would be around \$20,000 *before* other expenses were deducted.³⁵

In the end, Motown's ITMI division, founded in 1961, always maintained more control over performers' earnings than most of them would have liked.

By the mid-1960s many artists and musicians had begun to question the company's contracts, specifically its royalty policy. As early as 1966 Clarence Paul, Motown's assistant artist and repertoire director, held a meeting at his house in an attempt to organize Motown artists and producers collectively. The effort ended quickly when participants discovered Motown management monitored the meeting from parked cars outside Paul's house—taking photographs of all who entered.³⁶ In January

1967 Mickey Stevenson, who was instrumental in developing Motown's large pool of talented artists, left the company along with his wife, singer Kim Weston. Ostensibly, the departure was motivated by an offer to run a record division for MCM on the West Coast, but many insiders felt that Stevenson had grown disenchanted with Motown's miserly business practices.³⁷ Even the Temptations, one of Motown's most successful groups, contemplated going on strike in the hopes of negotiating a better contract. In his autobiography Otis Williams recalled, "Maybe ignorance is bliss, because it wasn't until many of us learned through a wider circle of acquaintances in all areas of the business that our contracts with Motown were substantially below industry standards . . . No matter how much money we were making, Eddie (Kendricks) thought that Motown was giving us a raw deal . . . Eddie's solution was simpler: the Temptations would go on strike—no more tours, no more records."³⁸ H-D-H's work slowdown began soon after the release of the Supremes' hit "Reflections" in September 1967. Their next song, "In and Out of Love" reached only number nine on the pop charts and, by February 1968, the songwriting team was offering no new material.

The Holland-Dozier-Holland job action began in late 1967 and early 1968 but did not become a legal battle until the summer of 1968—about the time DRUM was gaining strength in Detroit's automobile industry. In August 1968 Motown sued H-D-H for \$4 million for breach of contract and damages resulting from their lack of productivity. The suit also attempted to prevent the writers from working for any other record company. Holland, Dozier, and Holland refused to return to work regardless of the lawsuit. Then, in November 1968, the team countersued the corporation for \$22 million, charging "conspiracy, fraud, deceit, overreaching, and breach of fiduciary relationships." The countersuit received extensive press coverage in Detroit and in national publications such as *Jet* magazine and *Rolling Stone*.³⁹

Motown's happy family was beginning to crumble. *Jet* magazine reported that in the lawsuit Holland, Dozier, and Holland charged "that Gordy 'throughout the period of association [with] the plaintiffs . . . repented to the plaintiffs that he was their true friend and in effect *their father* who would look out for their best interests and should be given their complete trust and confidence' and that he betrayed both their trust

and confidence in him" (italics mine).⁴⁰ The songwriters' accusation went to the heart of a central contradiction at Motown Records between its desire to be a family and its urge to be a hit factory. The family ethos was easy to maintain in Motown's early years, when the company ran on a shoestring and offered hot lunches to whoever helped out. By 1968, however, Hitsville, U.S.A., had grown into an international corporation with hundreds of employees, offices around the world, and gross annual profits of approximately \$25 million. The corporate growth, while profitable for Motown's top executives and stars, quickly dispelled any illusions that a business functions like a family.⁴¹

Motown's hit factory, in other words, shared more than efficient production techniques with Detroit's larger automobile industry. The company's internal labor crisis revealed that the promise of black capitalism—the long-held belief that it would provide racial and economic justice for African Americans—was more myth than reality. A black cultural worker at Motown might have as much need to strike as a black autoworker at Detroit's Dodge Main Plant.⁴²

The initial stages of Motown's legal battle with H-D-H, which continued for years, were particularly tense. By late 1968 the daily management of the company was increasingly separated from the daily routine at the recording studios on West Grand Boulevard. The company's recent expansion to the Donovan Building on Woodward Avenue created a distance between the creative staff at the Hitsville studios and the executive offices located in the sterile high-rise building downtown. Moreover, when H-D-H refused to return to work, Berry Gordy promoted Ralph Seltzer, one of the company's white executives, to take over as director of artists and repertoire, which Eddie Holland had been heading after Mickey Stevenson left for MCM. Seltzer, who came from a legal background, had a reputation for being difficult. Many people who had been with Motown since the early years did not feel that he was the best person to run the company's creative division and saw the promotion as misguided. According to Raynoma Gordy Singleton, Berry Gordy "had appointed people who had no history with the company, people with little or no experience making music and with little or no respect for those who knew how, to prominent positions in the company. They were business people, pure and simple. That they were given power in creative decisions was in-

sulting to the Motown veterans. The fact that they were white only aggravated the situation, and the whole thing resonated deeply among the black ranks who were being pushed to the rear guard."⁴³ Then, in the fall of 1968, Berry Gordy purchased a home in Los Angeles—a clear sign of his growing interest in the company's projects on the West Coast.⁴⁴

Without question, Motown Records was becoming less and less connected to the Motor City as it grew and diversified. Diana Ross and the Supremes' farewell concert reflected this trend. On January 14, 1970, the group performed its final show as "Diana Ross and the Supremes" at the Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas. The curtain went up around midnight as an exuberant crowd greeted Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Cindy Birdsong for their final appearance together. They opened with a medley of their top hits, including "Stop! In the Name of Love," "Baby Love," and "Come See about Me." Ross, eager to acknowledge her close relationship to Berry Gordy, sang two solos, "Didn't We" and "My Man," in his honor. The finale began with the first few chords of their current hit "Someday We'll Be Together" and ended with a rendition of "The Impossible Dream." After several standing ovations, Frank Sennes, the entertainment director of the Frontier Hotel, presented the women with flowers and a plaque for the hotel's "Wall of Fame." He also read two telegrams of greetings from Ed Sullivan and the mayor of Las Vegas. Mary Wilson, Cindy Birdsong, and Jean Terrell, a replacement for Diana Ross, continued as the Supremes, but the departure of Ross, who wanted to pursue a solo career, marked the end of an era.⁴⁵

The concert's location in Las Vegas seemed appropriate, yet odd. The Las Vegas venue accurately represented how far the group had come—as nightclub entertainers, but it was quite removed, literally and figuratively, from the Supremes' beginnings in Detroit. The evening's tributes also ignored the contributions of Florence Ballard, who—by 1970—was struggling to save her professional career.⁴⁶ A farewell performance at the Motor City's Twenty Grand or the Roostertail Club might have pleased local Hitsville loyalists, but Motown chose the Las Vegas location instead. The Supremes' final concert at the *Frontier* Hotel in Las Vegas accurately symbolized the company's "westward expansion" out of Detroit. In her autobiography Mary Wilson noted that the violence that occurred after King's assassination marked a turning point at Motown: "Back in Detroit

... the rioters had done incredible damage, and this event marked a turning point for Motown. The Supremes had been recording so frequently in Los Angeles that I was spending more time there than at home, and I had considered moving there. After the riots my decision was firm. Every time I was on the West Coast, I'd scout around for the perfect house."⁴⁷

Just a few months before Diana Ross and the Supremes' farewell performance, Motown debuted what became the last major "product" of its Detroit assembly line: the Jackson 5. The five young brothers—Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, Marlon, and Michael Jackson—impressed Berry Gordy with their precocious professionalism, discipline, and raw talent at their audition in the summer of 1968.⁴⁸ By October 1969 they had released their first single, "I Want You Back," which began a string of top-ten pop hits that eventually included "ABC," "I'll Be There," and "Never Can Say Goodbye." The group's youthful charm recaptured the spirit of Motown's earliest years, when teenagers such as Diane Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard sang and hung out on the steps of Hitsville, U.S.A., after school. The Jackson 5 were not, however, from Detroit, though their own hometown—the steel town of Gary, Indiana—shared the Motor City's midwestern, industrial ethos. Moreover, though their audition was in Michigan, the Jackson 5 moved to Los Angeles soon after they signed their contracts—yet another sign of Motown's shift away from West Grand Boulevard.

Motown based the "artist development" program for the Jackson 5 in California. In the true Hitsville tradition, the company controlled every aspect of the Jackson 5's public image and performance. Motown writers and producers designed songs specifically for the new group and trained the young boys in choreography, etiquette, and grooming. Whenever the press interviewed the Jacksons, Motown representatives were on hand to monitor their responses. On one occasion a reporter asked the group if they supported Black Power. Before the boys could answer, a Motown spokesperson interjected that the group did not think about such matters because they were a "commercial product." Describing the scene, Michael Jackson recalled, "I guess they were worried about the possibility of our sounding militant the way people were often doing in those days. Maybe they were worried after they gave us those Afros that they had created little Frankensteins." The incident encapsulated a growing

tension at the record company between the artists and management about the relationship of the company's music to the political and social milieu that surrounded it. The company's interest in the production of commercial products overrode any artist's desire to create work that engaged in political or social commentary. By 1970, however, the "commercial" and the "political" aspects of any black cultural product could no longer be mutually exclusive—even at Motown.⁴⁹

"The Sound of the Struggle"

In October 1970 Motown Records finally released the Langston Hughes and Margaret Danner poetry album—exactly seven years after the company originally recorded it. The recording of the poets' "revolutionary" verse became one of the first offerings of Motown's Black Forum spoken-word label.⁵⁰ The Black Forum project was decidedly race-conscious from the outset. The label's credo, published on album covers, stated that "Black Forum is a medium for the presentation of ideas and voices of the worldwide struggle of Black people to create a new era. Black Forum also serves to provide authentic materials for use in schools and colleges and for the home study of Black history and culture. Black Forum is a permanent record of the sound of the struggle and the sound of a new era."⁵¹

Ewart Abner, Junius Griffin, and George Schiffer were in charge of the label and shaped its political orientation. Abner and Griffin befriended George Schiffer when they were hired at the company in the spring of 1967. Schiffer, Motown's long-time contract lawyer, worked currently as a civil rights attorney for the Congress of Racial Equality in New York City. Each of these men had a commitment to the civil rights struggle that extended beyond the confines of Motown Studios on West Grand Boulevard. They perceived the Black Forum project as an opportunity to record subjects and issues often ignored by the musical offerings of the company.

The first Black Forum albums reflected the political agenda and creative interests of the label's producers. Both Abner and Griffin were friends of Stokely Carmichael, and they invited him to come to Motown to record a speech on the subject of his choice. Carmichael accepted

and recorded *Free Huey!* in honor of imprisoned Black Panther Huey Newton. The label's second album was a recording of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech "Why I Oppose the War in Vietnam." Junius Griffin, who had worked closely with King at SCLC, produced the album, which eventually won the Grammy Award for best spoken-word recording in 1970.

Black Forum's literary offerings evolved from George Schiffer's involvement with the black arts movement, including his associations with Woodie King and Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones). Woodie King, a leader in the black theater movement, began his career in Detroit during the years that Margaret Danner's Boone House was thriving. He agreed to help produce the Black Forum poetry releases. The Hughes-Danner album was the first poetry release, produced when Griffin and Schiffer found the master tapes in Motown's recording archives. Over time, the label also produced *It's Nation Time*, featuring the poetry of Amiri Baraka; *Elaine Brown: Until We're Free*, featuring songs by Black Panther Elaine Brown; and *Black Spirits*, which was recorded live at the Apollo Theater in Harlem and featured the work of Baraka, Clarence Major, the Original Last Poets, and David Henderson, among others.⁵²

The Black Forum project never shied away from provocative and politically charged subjects. In February 1972 the label produced *Guess Who's Coming Home: Black Fighting Men Recorded Live in Vietnam*, based on the research audio tapes of Wallace Terry, a black journalist who traveled to Southeast Asia and collected the personal and often brutal stories of black soldiers.⁵³ Also, in April 1972, Black Forum released *The Congressional Black Caucus*, which featured the keynote speeches of Ossie Davis and Bill Cosby at the first annual banquet of the caucus. Detroit's own Charles C. Diggs Jr. and John Conyers founded the coalition of black congressional representatives.

The Black Forum label allowed Motown to engage with political ideas and activities usually not associated with the company. This engagement did not, however, gain much public notice owing to the label's poor distribution and publicity. Martin Luther King Jr.'s recordings achieved more success than the others. Motown mounted special advertising campaigns after King's death, particularly in *Ebony* and *Jet* magazine, to promote these recordings as a memorial to his life. The other

Black Forum albums were often forced on record distributors. Berry Gordy told the distributors that they could not receive Motown's latest musical release unless they also agreed to take the Black Forum recordings.⁵⁴

While the Black Forum label failed to attract large audiences, it was nevertheless significant that the company created an outlet for controversial ideas and black poetry. Motown strategically decided, of course, to produce this "forum" of the black struggle on an obscure label clearly separate from the company's popular musical offerings. The separation bespoke the apprehension that existed within the company between its commitment to present "ideas and voices of the worldwide struggle of Black people" and its desire to avoid conflict and maintain its commercial appeal with the widest possible audiences.

Motown's ambivalence about its obligation to record the "sound of the struggle" heightened when several of the company's artists and producers began to create music that addressed social and political issues. Stevie Wonder was the first artist to record such material in his June 1966 release of Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind." Many listeners embraced Wonder's rendition of the folk song as a poignant commentary about the embattled civil rights movement. He quickly followed the hit single with his album *Down to Earth* in November of 1966, which included the song "A Place in the Sun"—a continuation of some of the sentiments expressed in "Blowin' in the Wind." These recordings were quite successful on the music charts, but they did not dramatically alter the content of most Hitsville releases, which continued to be dominated by love songs and dance tunes. Motown remained hesitant in 1966 and 1967 to produce songs that could be interpreted as social commentary or what were later referred to as "message" songs.

By 1968, however, Hitsville, U.S.A., began to experiment with producing songs for the Supremes and the Temptations that addressed social issues. Ironically, the Holland-Dozier-Holland work slowdown resulted in the company's first major "message" song: the Supremes' "Love Child." When H-D-H refused to write any material for the group, Berry Gordy organized another team of writers to compose a new song for the Supremes. Gordy decided to call the new writing team—comprised of Deke Richards, Frank Wilson, R. Dean Taylor, and Pam Sawyer—the "Clan."

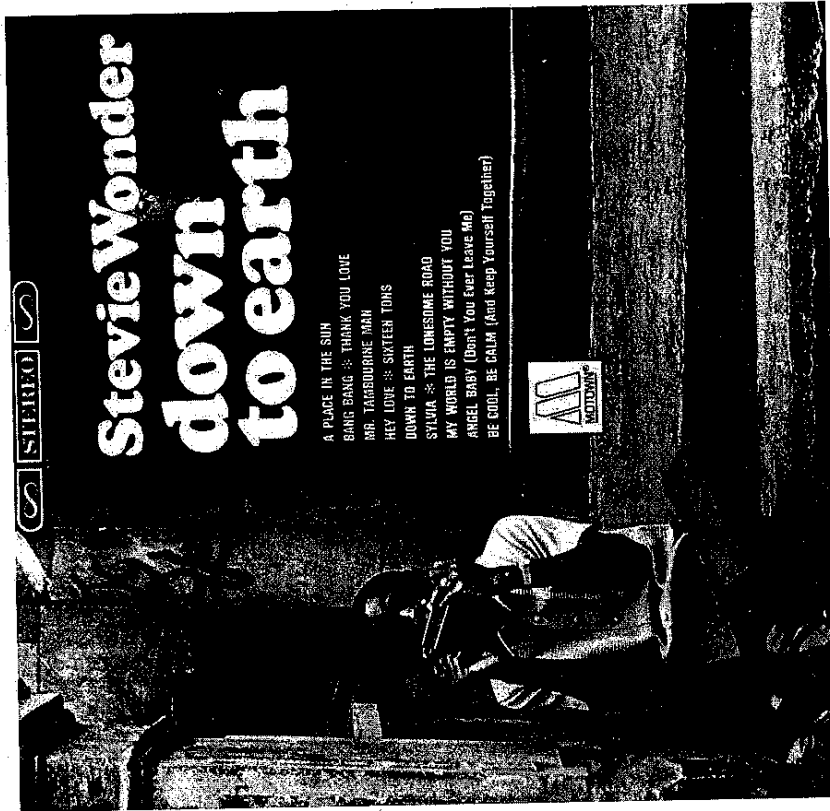
Initially, the group resisted the name and its resonance with the Ku Klux Klan. Gordy persisted, in light of the H-D-H legal battle, claiming, "I wanted to take a so-called negative word, and use it positively . . . I didn't want to use individual names because I wanted to keep egos at a minimum." Gordy's insistence on the name reflected his desire not only to "keep egos at a minimum" but to ensure that the writers would remain anonymous. This tactic would fend off any legal disputes in the future about who owned the songs that the Clan wrote and their earnings. The H-D-H lawsuit clearly had an immediate influence on how other songwriters were treated at the company.⁵⁵

The Clan's first effort was "Love Child," a song that describes the trials of unwed motherhood in the ghetto. The lyrics tell a moral tale that warns listeners to avoid premarital sex and the potential burdens of an unplanned pregnancy ("This love we're contemplating / Is worth the pain of waiting / We'll only end up hating / The child we may be creating.") Motown released "Love Child" in September 1968. The record rapidly went to number one on the pop charts and eventually outsold every Supremes record before it.

The song proved the appeal of social commentary songs and Motown's astute marketing skills. As the single climbed the charts, Motown went to work to produce a follow-up album. The album cover featured a photograph of the three glamorous women in an uncharacteristic setting—leaning on the brick wall of a ghetto alley in sweatshirts and tattered jeans. Stevie Wonder's 1966 album *Down to Earth* had been the first Motown album cover to feature an urban ghetto landscape. With both albums, it was obvious that a change in the visual presentation of the artists accompanied the musical change of addressing social topics. When the Supremes appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* to promote the song, they abandoned their glittering ballgowns for new "ghetto" costumes. Their tattered jeans and natural hairdos acted as an effective marketing tool to package and sell the unconventional song. With "Love Child," Motown Records transformed one of the central policy concerns of America's War on Poverty—inner-city unwed mothers—into a profitable musical product.

The Temptations' "psychedelic phase," which coincided with the Supremes' "Love Child" hit also participated in Motown's new, yet cau-

Dancing in the Street



Cover of Stevie Wonder's *Down to Earth* album, 1966. (Courtesy Motown Record Co., L.P., a Polygram Company.)

tious, shift to "message" music. Beginning with the release of "Cloud Nine" in October 1968, the Temptations started performing songs that addressed politically charged subject matter including experimental drug use, racial segregation, and the plight of blacks living in the inner city. Norman Whitfield, Motown's new star producer, masterminded the Temptations' shift from songs such as "My Girl" to "Psychodelic Shack" and "Ball of Confusion (That's What the World Is Today)." These songs also departed musically from the traditional Motown sound. Whitfield had Motown's Funk Brothers experiment with a heavier use of electric guitar,

"What's Going On?"

wah-wah pedals, and different rhythms. The Temptations broke down their background vocal arrangements. Each singer sang different lines and parts rather than keeping to their usual unified call-and-response style.⁵⁶

These new styles influenced Whitfield when he began to compose the militant anti-Vietnam song "War!" with Motown songwriter Barrett Strong. The song, with its pounding beat and shouted lyrics ("War—Uh! What is it good for? / Absolutely nothin'!"), made a militant statement against the Vietnam conflict. Whitfield wrote "War!" for the Temptations, but Motown's management deemed the song too controversial for the famous singing group. As a compromise, Motown gave the song to solo artist Edwin Starr, who had recently joined the company as a result of the Golden World/Ric Tic buy-out. "War!" quickly reached number one on the pop charts during the summer of 1970. Motown's decision to give Starr, a lesser-known artist, rather than the Temptations the opportunity to sing a song as polemical as "War!" reflected the company's vigilance



Diana Ross and the Supremes perform "Love Child," 1968. (Courtesy Motown Record Co., L.P., a Polygram Company.)

about its political affiliations. Motown hoped that Edwin Starr's relative obscurity as a singer would keep the contentious song out of the limelight. Ironically, of course, Starr's rendition of the song was so powerful that it received attention and commercial success beyond what the Temptations' version might have achieved. The popularity of the tune with pop audiences confounded the company's decision to use Starr to detract publicity from the song's angry content. The unexpected success of "War!" did not, however, make Motown more receptive to artistic freedom. The company continued to attempt to control the creative process at Hitsville Studios. This control, however, was about to face its greatest challenge.⁵⁷

"What's Happening, Brother?"

I always knew I was an artist . . . and not the cog in some machine. To be an artist is a blessing and a privilege. Artists must never betray their true hearts. Artists must look beneath the surface and show that there is more to this world than meets the eye.

—Marvin Gaye

Marvin Gaye's career at Motown mirrored the larger ambivalence within the record company about its relationship to the turbulent political milieu of the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁵⁸ Gaye first began singing during the mid-1950s, when he performed with the Rainbows and the Marquees at gigs in his hometown of Washington, D.C. In 1958 Harvey Fuqua, a talented songwriter and producer, arrived in Washington looking for new talent for his own group, the Moonglows. Fuqua recruited Gaye, and the group traveled to Chicago to record on the Chess label. Fuqua and Gaye arrived in Detroit in 1959 and became involved with Berry Gordy's early efforts to start his own record label. Gaye was one of the first artists to sign on the Tamla label and initially worked as a backup musician on several of Motown's first records. Soon, however, Gordy realized that Gaye, a shy man with a captivating stage presence, had potential as a solo artist. His first single, "Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide," was released in May 1961. One year later, Gaye had his first hit with "Stubborn Kind of Fellow" in July 1962. A string of hits soon followed, including "Hitch Hike," "Pride and Joy," and "Can I Get a Witness." In

"What's Going On?"

the midst of this success, Gaye became an official member of the Gordy family when he married Berry's sister Anna, in 1963.⁵⁹

Marvin Gaye enjoyed being on the top of the pop charts but longed to move beyond the teen market. As a young singer he idolized Frank Sinatra and hoped one day to match Sinatra's success as an elegant balladeer.⁶⁰ Many of Gaye's solo efforts, such as his tribute album to Nat King Cole in 1965, did not sell well, but his romantic duets with Mary Wells, Kim Weston, and Tammi Terrell, including "Your Precious Love" and "You're All I Need to Get By," proved his talent with ballads. By the late 1960s, however, Gaye found it increasingly difficult to perform music that seemed utterly removed from the social concerns of the day. He struggled to reconcile his artistic and commercial success as a singer with his political ideas and beliefs. In an interview Gaye once commented, "Suffering and injustice are things which I've always felt deep in my soul, and I wondered what I was doing singing rock and roll in some dive instead of leading the marchers. I know I had that ability, but that wasn't my role. My role was to sing. Years later when Bob Marley came around, I saw that both things were possible. His music caused political change, and that's why he'll occupy a high place in history."⁶¹

In 1966 Gaye's brother, Frankie, returned from serving in Vietnam. Frankie Gaye had a difficult time finding work and eventually had to accept a job as a hotel doorman. Marvin, moved by his brother's courage and sacrifice, vowed that he would one day write a song in honor of him. In 1971 he fulfilled his promise with the poignant song "What's Happening, Brother?" one of the movements in Gaye's masterpiece: the *What's Going On?* album. Marvin Gaye composed the album over the course of several years. When completed, the work addressed not only the senselessness of the Vietnam war, but also ecology, racism, and urban violence. Berry Gordy initially resisted the project. Gordy felt Gaye's subject matter had little, if any, commercial potential and would damage Gaye's image as a balladeer. Moreover, Gordy wanted to maintain a clear division of labor within Motown's creative process and continued to believe that performers should not be given much artistic freedom. Despite these obstacles, Gaye pursued the project and was encouraged by friends and Motown songwriters such as James Nyx, who cowrote "What's Happening, Brother?"⁶²

Musically, *What's Going On?* broke new ground. The recording refined the idea of a concept album in which all the songs on a long-playing record are interwoven and unified by a cohesive theme. On *What's Going On?* nine individual and highly textured songs, among them "What's Going On?" "What's Happening, Brother?" "Save the Children," "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)," and "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)," were presented as a seamless whole. As the lyrics of one song ended, the instrumental backup melted into the subsequent song with no sound breaks or fade-outs between sets. This continuity gave the recording a musical unity and thematic completeness that had never been attempted before in popular music. Gaye layered the musical arrangements in a lush, orchestrated, yet improvisational style. The finished songs offered a stark contrast to the regulated structure, rhythm, and syncopation of standard Motown hits such as the Temptations' "My Girl."

These musical innovations heightened the political impact of Gaye's lyrics. The music created a spiritual atmosphere and stage on which Gaye could portray his drama about poverty, violence, racial discrimination, and social injustice. The combination captivated audiences and music critics—contrary to all of Berry Gordy's initial misgivings about the project. The "What's Going On?" single was released in January 1971, and by early March the song had reached number two on the pop charts and number one on *Billboard's* "Soul" chart. When audiences embraced the album, the company had to acknowledge that there was, in fact, a market for socially conscious music and that this music should not be delegated to lesser-known artists, such as Edwin Starr, or released on a more obscure label like Black Forum.⁶³

The astonishing success of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On?* also renegotiated the terms on which Motown music participated in political organizing. In September 1972 the album inspired the theme of Jesse Jackson's first Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) Expo in Chicago. Jackson founded Operation PUSH in December 1971. The expo, like Detroit's Black Arts Convention, brought together black political leaders, businesses, community activists, and entertainers to share ideas, participate in workshops, organize grass-roots efforts, and celebrate black culture and music. Jackson entitled the first annual fundraiser "Save the Children," quoting the title of Gaye's song from *What's*

Going On? Motown artists including Gladys Knight and the Pips, the Temptations, and Gaye came to the four-day event and performed in support of the expo. Paramount Pictures filmed the festivities and released *Save the Children* as a feature film to the general public. At most charity benefits, Motown artists performed their hit songs as entertainment. In Chicago, Marvin Gaye's music did more than entertain when it inspired the entire theme of the Operation PUSH Expo. *What's Going On?* and specifically "Save the Children," poetically captured the gathering's political agenda, which sought to address the concerns facing black America—particularly in the urban North. In 1972 this agenda was quite pertinent to Detroit, as the city headed toward an election year and Motown began a critical transition.⁶⁴

"Ball of Confusion"

People movin' out, people movin' in,
Why—because of the color of skin,
Run, run, run, but you sho' can't hide.
An eye for an eye, A tooth for a tooth,
Vote for me and I'll set you free.
Rap on brother, rap on.

—The Temptations, "Ball of Confusion (That's What the World Is Today)"

In June 1972 the Motown Record Company officially announced its plan to move its headquarters from Detroit to Los Angeles. The pronouncement came as a tremendous blow to the Motor City and as a particular betrayal to the city's black community. Yet local press coverage of the announcement was straightforward and factual. The *Michigan Chronicle* ran a front-page story about the decision on June 24, 1972. The article briefly recounted Motown's history in Detroit and then quoted Amos Wilder, a company vice president and general manager, who explained the departure as "simply a matter of sound business judgment, economics and logistics." The only hint of editorial comment came from the reporter, Rita Griffin, who responded to Wilder's dry economic explanations with the final words, "Sounds almost apologetic." Reaction on the streets of black Detroit was a bit more emotional. Soon after Motown's announce-

ment, a rumor began to circulate at local black radio stations that Berry Gordy allegedly had remarked, "If a black disc jockey [in Detroit] never played one of my records, I wouldn't give a damn." The comment was most likely pure fabrication, but gossip about its existence did reveal the anger felt by many about Motown's decision. Many black disc jockeys boycotted Motown songs, with the exception of Stevie Wonder's music, for months after the rumor began. The silencing of Motown music from the airwaves that first brought it fame powerfully expressed the acrimony that the company's move engendered.⁶⁵

The relocation of corporate headquarters to California was a logical business decision for Motown in light of the company's recent inroads into the film industry. In early 1971 Berry Gordy set up a movie deal to produce a film depicting Billie Holiday's life story. Gordy, a long-time admirer of Holiday, first met the singer at Detroit's Flame Show Bar in the 1950s. His film project, *Lady Sings the Blues*, allowed him to honor the great singer and simultaneously nurture Diana Ross's solo career by offering her the starring role. *Lady Sings the Blues* went into production in December 1971 and was released in October 1972, only a few months after Motown's relocation announcement. The film received critical acclaim and eventually four Academy Award nominations including a best actress nomination for Diana Ross. Although Ross did not win the award—losing to Liza Minnelli for her work in *Cabaret*—the film's many nominations suggested that Motown could become a real force in Hollywood, just as it had risen to the top of the record industry.⁶⁶

As Motown pressed ahead with its Hollywood projects and packed up its offices in the Motor City, black Detroit turned its political energies to gaining control of city hall. The first drive to elect a black mayor gained momentum in the wake of the destruction of 1967. Deep-seated skepticism existed within the city's black community about the largely white and corporate-run New Detroit committee, which led the city's efforts to rebuild itself. Many local activists, in light of these doubts, believed that only a black mayor could adequately address the needs and protect the rights of the city's black citizens. Also, the rise of DRUM in 1968 and the subsequent formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in 1969 confirmed that black coalitions could instigate radical change

and raise political consciousness. For these reasons, Richard Austin, an experienced local politician, organized a campaign in 1969 to become Detroit's first black mayor.

The Austin campaign had a promising start but was quickly mired in the racial politics of the city. Austin, a black moderate Democrat who believed in building biracial coalitions, won in the primary elections with 45,856 votes but came up against his main competitor, Wayne County Sheriff Roman S. Gribbs, in the final election. Sheriff Gribbs campaigned on the theme of law and order, which attracted many white voters. Local polls revealed that while black voters were open to voting for both black and white candidates, white voters tended to vote only for white candidates. White voters were a bit more receptive to black candidates running for smaller offices such as city council seats but were highly opposed to the idea of a black mayor. During the election the *Detroit Free Press* conducted a voter survey which discovered that the main concerns of white voters were welfare, crime, and "the colored taking over." Austin had difficulty campaigning when it became clear that many white voters were going to vote against him solely on the basis of race. In his weekly column in the *Michigan Chronicle*, the Reverend Albert B. Cleage Jr. acknowledged that Austin's chances of winning without the white vote were slim; and he argued that more black citizens needed to register to vote if Austin were to have any chance at all. Without the much-needed coalition of black and white voters, Austin lost the election by a slim margin—only 6,184 votes. Sheriff Gribbs became Mayor Gribbs and the new law-and-order administration set the stage for the next battle for city hall in 1973.⁶⁷

"Inner City Blues (Makes Me Wanna Holler)"

In his song "Inner City Blues (Makes Me Wanna Holler)," Marvin Gaye sings about how "crime is increasing" and laments that because of "[t]rigger-happy policing / panic is spreading / God knows where we're heading." At the time of the song's release in 1971, tensions between the Detroit police force and the city's black citizens were high. Police brutality or "trigger-happy policing" against black Detroiters had been a volatile political issue since the Detroit Police Department was first founded after the race riot of 1863. In the late 1960s and early 1970s,

police-community relations were perhaps the most contentious issue in Detroit city politics. The election of Sheriff Gribbs in 1969 proved that a majority of white Detroiters preferred a city administration that would maintain law and order on city streets. For black Detroit, law and order came at a high price, and many felt that only a black mayor could ease the tensions between the city's primarily white police force and its black citizens. Richard Austin's narrow loss to Mayor Gribbs encouraged others to begin planning a new campaign to elect a black mayor in 1973.

Local political organizers knew that they needed a strong candidate and a sound platform to elect Detroit's first black mayor. Coleman Young and Detroit's continuing struggles with police-community relations provided the last pieces in the puzzle. Young, a Michigan state senator, had built his political reputation as a radical leader. As a young man, Young worked at Ford, but he was fired after an altercation with a white racist foreman. He flew as a second lieutenant with the Tuskegee Army and fought against Jim Crow segregation within the military. In 1951 he participated in the founding of the National Negro Labor Council (NNLC), the most radical black labor organization of its time, and was eventually elected executive director. Because of his involvement with NNLC, Young was ordered to testify about his relationship to the Communist Party before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1952. When he appeared before the committee, Young boldly defied his accusers. In his testimony he proclaimed: "I am part of the Negro people . . . I am now in the process of fighting against what I consider to be attacks and discrimination against my people. I am fighting against un-American activities such as lynchings and denial of the vote. I am dedicated to that fight, and I don't think I have to apologize or explain it to anybody." Young's bravado won him many fans in Detroit. Local supporters circulated phonograph recordings of his testimony throughout the city's black community.⁶⁸

These legends about Young's combative personality and lifelong commitment to fighting racism and supporting labor unions made his candidacy for mayor a striking contrast to Richard Austin's 1969 campaign, which relied on a more moderate platform. Moreover, Young's militant approach was well suited to the issues that came to dominate the

1973 election—most notably, the continuing struggle over police brutality. In January 1971 Detroit's police commissioner, John Nichols, formed a new elite undercover police operation called STRESS, which stood for "Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets." The majority of the officers assigned to the STRESS squads were white and were trained to use decoy techniques to entrap criminals in Detroit's "high-crime" neighborhoods—most often black neighborhoods. The STRESS units quickly became a notorious and violent presence in black Detroit. By the end of 1971 Detroit's Police Department was leading the country in the number of civilian killings per capita—at a rate of 7.17 civilians per 1,000 officers. More than one-third of the killings were committed by STRESS officers, who represented only 2 percent of the entire police force. Public protests against STRESS began as early as September 1971, when over 5,000 people attended a rally to abolish the unit, and continued throughout 1972 and into the election year of 1973.⁶⁹

Coleman Young used the STRESS controversy as the focal point of his campaign platform. With Police Commissioner John Nichols as his main opponent, the issue was difficult to avoid. Nichols beat Young in the primary election winning 33.8 percent of the vote to Young's 21.1 percent. In the final election both candidates had to win voters across racial lines. Nichols attempted to capitalize on white fears of black crime by emphasizing his law-and-order approach. Young, an experienced politician, broadened his platform to include economic redevelopment and won the support of several business organizations. Young's combination of a forceful attack against STRESS, a promise to increase minority hiring in the Detroit Police Department, and economic revitalization plans won the election. On November 6, 1973, Detroit voted in its first African American mayor.

I hope you hear inside my voice of sorrow
And that it motivates you to make a better tomorrow
This place is cruel nowhere could be much colder
If we don't change, the world will soon be over
Living just enough, stop giving just enough for the city!!!

—Stevie Wonder, "Living for the City"

Motown Records had already left Detroit for Los Angeles when Coleman Young won the mayoral election. Coincidentally, however, the record company released Stevie Wonder's single "Living for the City" during the election month of November 1973. Wonder's song, inspired by the success of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On?* album, directly engages with social issues as it tells the tale of a young black man who migrates from the South to the urban North. Once in the city, the protagonist confronts the struggles, temptations, and despair of urban life in the ghetto.⁷⁰ In the song's closing refrain Wonder makes an urgent plea for change—a plea that had particular relevance to Detroit, which was on the verge of black political control. Coleman Young's election, by its very uniqueness, created tremendous excitement and speculation about what this "new" era could bring to an increasingly enervated city.

By 1973 Detroit's economic base had deteriorated, as many companies and white citizens left the city for the suburbs after the devastation of 1967. Motown's departure for California in 1972 participated in this trend, and the cultural loss to the black community was equally difficult. J. L. Hudson, founder of the original New Detroit committee and corporate leader, commented on the possibility of black political rule in Detroit on the fifth anniversary of the uprising in 1972. Hudson remarked, "The black man has the feeling he is about to take power in the city . . . but he is going to be left with an empty bag." Coleman Young somewhat similarly admitted, "I knew that this had only happened to me because, for once in my life, I was in the right place at the right time, and that my fortune was the direct result of my city's misfortune—of the same fear and loathing that had caused all my problems and Detroit's problems in the first place. I was taking over the administration of Detroit because the white people didn't want the damn thing anymore. They were getting the hell out, more than happy to turn over their troubles to some black sucker like me."⁷¹

The Motor City's economy was also hit hard in 1973 as a result of the OPEC oil embargo. According to historian William Chafe, "[p]rior to [1973], America had exercised virtually unchallenged economic and military dominance in the world. Afterward, it became a dependent nation." The national energy crisis reverberated with particular intensity in Detroit. The city's entire identity and economic base revolved around the

automotive industry—an industry completely dependent on the international oil market.⁷²

With all of these pressing concerns, Young's inauguration in January 1974 became a critical moment for the new mayor to proclaim his agenda and for his supporters to celebrate their victory. Young's backers, many of whom had participated in Detroit's Great March to Freedom or voted for a Freedom Now candidate in 1963, never imagined that the city would one day elect a black mayor. The inaugural gala held on January 2, 1974, captured much of the enthusiasm surrounding Young's new administration.

Motown Records sent Diana Ross in from the West Coast to perform at the gala. Esther Gordy Edwards, cochair of the inauguration festivities, arranged the concert, and Ross agreed to perform free of charge. When the evening finally arrived, Ross had to overcome several major setbacks, and the concert was almost canceled. Ross did not want to leave California when both of her children got sick with a virus days before the engagement. Then, on the trip to Michigan, the airlines lost her luggage, which held her costumes, makeup, and the complete musical arrangements for the show. Yet the singer pressed on. A costume was thrown together, and the orchestra rehearsed new arrangements. Ross credited Coleman Young and her local fans for her persistence. She told the press that normally under such difficult circumstances, "I wouldn't go on . . . I wouldn't be here if it weren't for the mayor . . . and for all the people who have paid their money and expect to see a show."⁷³

Ross's dedication in the face of adversity, widely covered in the local press, captured the spirit of Coleman Young's inauguration. Detroit had suffered many blows to its model-city image over the years, but Young believed that his new administration could persevere despite the setbacks and lead the city into a better future. Young's immediate agenda involved fulfilling campaign promises such as his vow to dismantle the STRESS unit in an effort to combat police brutality. Yet the new mayor did not want to appear "soft" on criminals in a city with a serious crime problem. In his inaugural speech Young boldly announced his intentions: "I issue a warning to all dope pushers, rip-off artists and muggers. It's time to leave Detroit—hit the road. Hit Eight Mile Road. I don't give a damn if they are black or white, or if they wear Superfly suits or blue uniforms

Dancing in the Street

with silver badges. Hit the road."⁷⁴ Young believed that his comments would reassure his constituents that he could promote law and order and also eliminate police brutality. But his brazen language and his reference to Eight Mile Road, the dividing line between the city and its surrounding, primarily white suburbs led many people to wonder if the new black mayor was going to agitate rather than calm the racial tensions that plagued Detroit's entire metropolitan area.

Coleman Young's "hit the road" remark unfortunately tapped into dominant fears that a black mayor would increase racial polarization between blacks and whites in Detroit and between the city and its suburbs. The long-fought struggle to elect a black mayor did not appear to ensure that Detroit was any closer to becoming a model of harmonious race relations than it was in 1963. The dream of black political power, like the myth of black capitalism, was more elusive in practice than in the imagination. In Detroit Young's election did lead to the end of the STRESS unit and an increase in minority hiring in the city's police force. But it did not bridge Detroit's entrenched racial divides or alter the basic configuration of economic power in the city, which was still maintained by white-owned private corporations.⁷⁵

Only Motown Records, which was the most profitable black business in America in 1973, could have reconfigured the racial composition of Detroit's corporate economy, but this possibility disappeared when the company left the city in 1972. In the end, black political control ascended in the Motor City only to be defined and circumscribed by its relationship to white corporate power. Motown's music—Stevie Wonder's "Living for the City" or Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On?"—did make eloquent statements about the plight of black Americans left with the "empty bag" of urban America. Yet, without Motown's cultural presence and financial profits invested in the city, the songs could only passively speak about, not actively participate in, Detroit's continuing struggle to create itself anew.⁷⁶

The year 1993 was a milestone was not only a commemorative Motown standard but an unimpeachable event of the year, time show. In between Motown artists of one contemporary medleys, Martha Foushing rendition voice sounded arounding the music the field, the Gram music, and a purely completely overwhelmed most famous line forgotten than Detroit This anniversary unmet celebration, funds to start his