

that whites represent a steadily growing proportion of the tenants; about half of these whites have moved in from the suburbs. "Builders are crawling all over Detroit now," Hagood adds. "Everybody's looking for sites." In addition, old houses in Detroit's in-town neighborhoods are selling better than they have for many years. They hold a fresh appeal for young couples whose alternative is to pay at least twice as much for a run-of-the-mill ranch house miles from anything but suburban sprawl.

To the west of Renaissance Center, industrialist-financier Max Fisher is attempting to do what Ford and Portman have put off doing, that is, build apartments on the riverfront. Fisher is about to break ground on a 2,500-unit high-rise that will be the first major apartment building constructed in central Detroit in two decades. "If it goes, it'll mean a lot to this town," Hagood says. "Even if we can get well-to-do whites interested in coming back in, at this point there's almost no place for them to live."

Recognizing the importance of such housing to Detroit, the Michigan legislature recently passed a bill that provides a 12-year moratorium on taxes on improvements made on land used for housing projects in the city. Without a break of this sort, developers would find the speculative ventures

that Detroit now badly needs much too risky to undertake.

If America's cities are to become stable, they need people who will live in them by choice, not, like the poor, because they are captives. Without such people, a city has too little vitality and spirit, as well as too small a tax base. New York, for all its fiscal problems, is healthier and more vital than many of the cities whose residents deride it—because it remains a place where people choose to live.

Detroit's predicament grows out of two deep roots. One is the plight of its poor. Optimistic predictions notwithstanding, Renaissance Center will do little for them; that is a job for government, through large-scale, imaginative programs, sensitively administered. The second root is the attitude of the middle class. As long as middle-class whites and increasing numbers of their black counterparts choose to live outside the city and avoid it whenever possible, Detroit cannot recover.

When suburbanites come to Renaissance to work or shop or eat at a restaurant, even if they come by armored car, their irrational fears may begin to dissipate, and they may discover the numerous advantages that any major city holds over any suburb. That is a far from certain prospect, but it is Detroit's best hope. ©

Henry Ford on Renaissance Center

The following questions were submitted to Henry Ford II by SR.

What is your response to the charge that Renaissance Center is an enclave for middle- and upper-class people—that it is intended to shut out others, especially poor blacks?

Renaissance Center is not intended to be an enclave of any kind. It is either creating or bringing to the city thousands of jobs, performed by people of all socioeconomic levels. The Detroit Plaza Hotel alone is creating 1,800 to 2,000 jobs. Renaissance tenants will be going out to visit a variety of restaurants and stores in the area. I'd expect even more of this if mass transportation becomes a reality downtown.

Some say that attracting people to live downtown, rather than just work downtown, is critical to revitalization of a city. If you agree, why is there no housing in Renaissance Center?

I agree—but you can do just so much at once. We didn't have enough money to do the housing on the river as well as the hotel and offices. We finally decided it was important to provide a reason for people to want to live downtown—hence development of the hotel, shops, and offices first. Once these phase one projects are in operation, about 20,000 people will be working at or visiting Renaissance Center daily. Their presence will create an environment that hopefully will make residential development a natural offshoot. As you know, another developer [Max Fisher] already has announced plans to build a 2,500-unit residential complex on the riverfront close to Renaissance Center.

You seem to feel that the profit motive is a necessary part of a development like Renaissance Center. What if the

federal government says to corporations like Ford Motor Company, "We will give concessions to you in lieu of taxes if you spend money downtown"? Is this a good approach?

I suppose any kind of incentive would be helpful, whether it's from the federal, state, or city government. Renaissance Center makes a different point, though: it was built with private capital and without any extraordinary tax breaks. What it says is that the competitive system works pretty well without any special governmental involvement.

Renaissance Center is top-heavy with auto-related investors and tenants. Is it therefore possible that it is not a true indicator of real business interest in Detroit—and not a blueprint for development elsewhere?

If auto interests are especially well represented among investors and tenants at Renaissance Center, so, too, are they well represented in many other endeavors in and around Detroit. Much of the gross national product in this city springs directly or indirectly from the auto business. But also involved at Renaissance Center is a great cross section of the entire community—public accounting firms, law offices, banks, consulting businesses, stockbrokers, airlines, retail offices, news media, and others.

Can Renaissance Center be considered a success on its own, or must it have spin-off effects in the city at large?

Renaissance Center, in and of itself, is not the answer to Detroit's problems. Renaissance Center will help the city by providing impressive physical structures and the jobs that go with them. The project also bolsters morale and demonstrates confidence in the future of the city. But if there were no spin-offs, Renaissance Center would be only partly successful. In these early stages of Renaissance, I'm pleased by the effect it already has had and I look for more. ©



IDS Building, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Gerald Brimacombe/Black Star

The Case Against Urban Dinosaurs

by William G. Conway

AS CONTEMPORARY wisdom would have it, the future of the American city depends on megastructures—those huge but slickly sophisticated commercial real estate projects that have been springing up in American cities for the past decade. Tax-starved mayors, along with the owners of dwindling downtown business establishments, persist in their claim that these giant renewal efforts are all that keep their cities from irreversible decay.

The truth is, however, that the megastructure guarantees neither the investment of its owners nor the future of the city. Far from lending strength to downtown areas, these complexes create little more than a suburban island in mid-city. The hope had been that the architectural behemoths would be the most promising of the creations thus far produced by the boom-bust cycle of real estate speculation. But it is the cycle itself, together with the size and complexity of the projects, that spells financial trouble for megastructure owners. Plagued by cost overruns, the overbuilding that accompanies speculative fever, and onerous finance charges,

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more and more owners are turning over control of their projects to the out-of-town financial institutions that made them possible in the first place. The size of the structures keeps financial institutions committed to the projects after owner troubles ensue.

Trailing in the wake of financial concerns has been the unforeseen dilemma these edifices impose on their host community: building them stimulates inflation—and thereby further agitates the deterioration of the central city, which further divides the poor from the middle and upper classes.

But what of the much touted benefits of the megastructures? They were intended as more than profit-making ventures for their investors: they were supposed to revive the central city. Generally, they draw people to the city no more successfully than they attract revenue.

It is understandable why mayors and businessmen would cling to anything that promised to stop the decentralization of downtown. The dwindling of population, retail trade, and jobs erodes the tax base. Those citizens left behind make bigger and bigger demands on the public treasury.

Billions have been spent in the United States to stem this flow from city to suburb. But despite the full-page ads and megastructural magnificence—or perhaps because of them—