



Motorcycle Club Detroit

Running Motown on two wheels

Bruce Findling

*Left: Outlaw Motorcycle
Club, Detroit!*

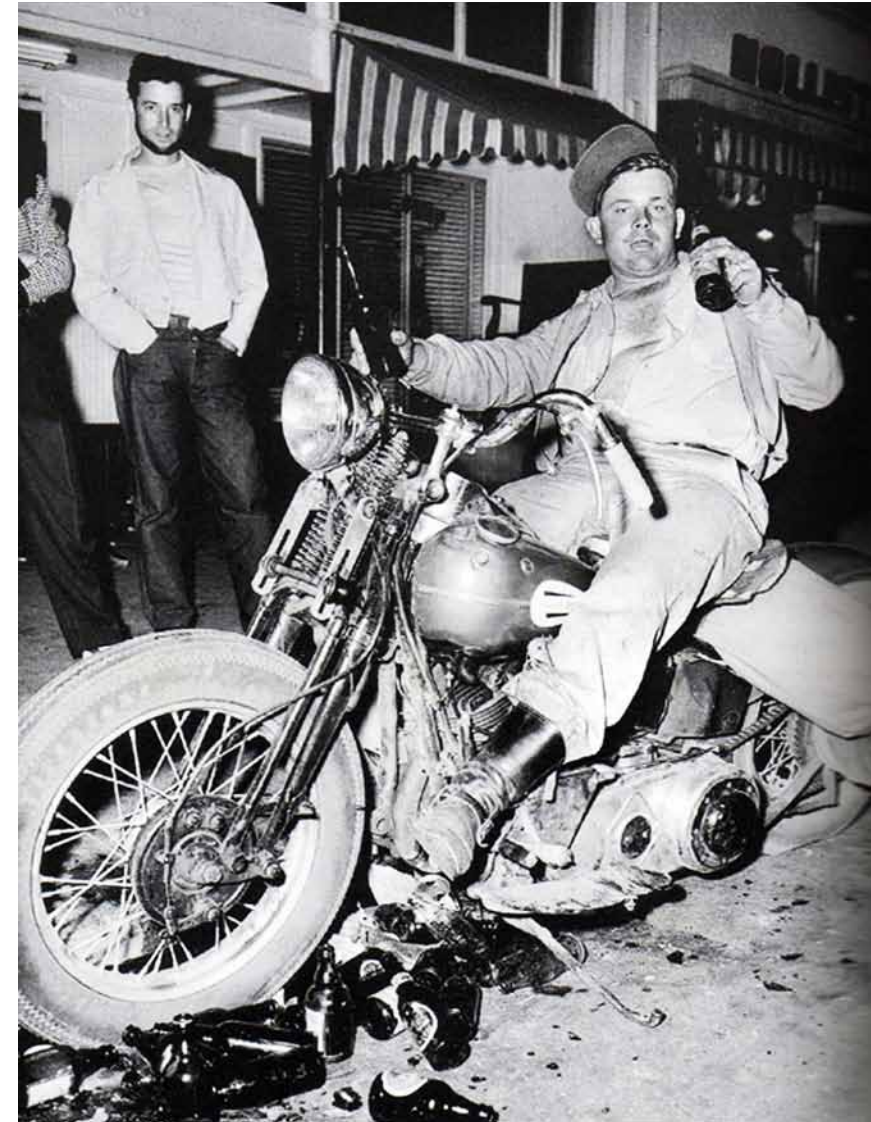
Black paint and a little bit of chrome can go a long way in defining a movement...what began as nothing more than a bicycle with a motor quickly turned into a symbol for rebellion, freedom and the open road.

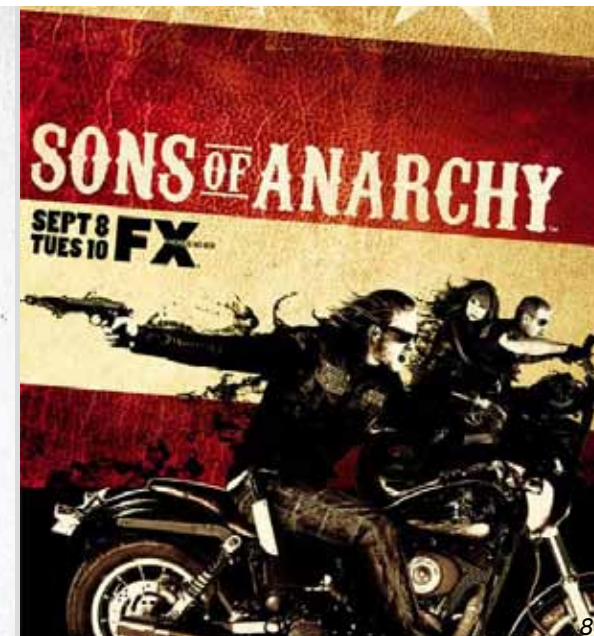
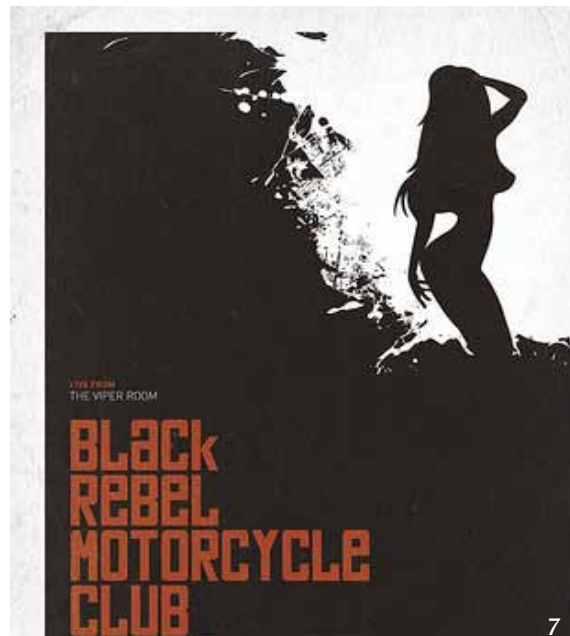
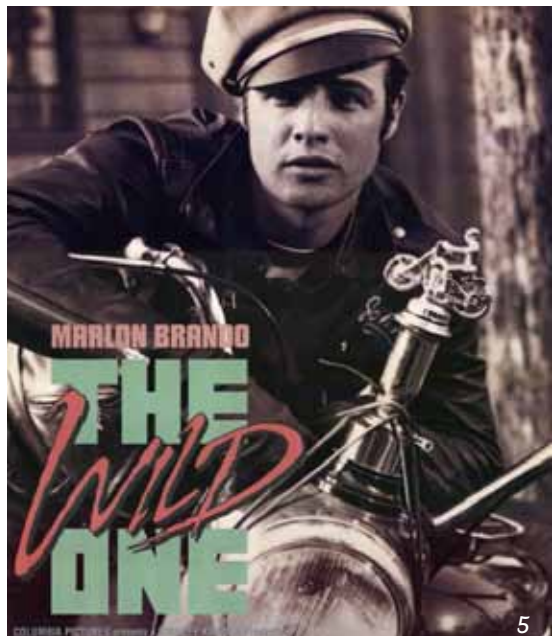
Though the motorcycle has existed in America since 1901, its place in our social fabric really began in the aftermath of World War II. American veterans returning home from war found motorcycles as an adequate replacement for the excitement, danger, and speed at which combat had previously given them. Clubs quickly formed based on the camaraderie and loyalty that their military units had instilled within the motorcyclists. It would be less than two years after the surrender of Japan that the general public would be given their first real glimpse of the American 'Biker' as we regard then today.³

July 4th, 1947. Hollister, California. Though there were over four thousand motorcyclists attending the Hollister rally, the Boozefighters Motorcycle Club received the most press through their heavy drinking, bar fights, and illegal street races. A picture of one of their members seen sitting on his bike amid a pile of beer bottles was published in Life Magazine shortly after, giving rise to a new public perception of motorcycle owners of the time.

Following the Hollister incident, the rally organizers gave a press conference in which they said that "the trouble was caused

by the one percent deviant that tarnishes the public image of both motorcycles and motorcyclists." The "One Percenter" motorcycle club had been born. Bent on a life beyond the law, One Percenter gangs formed throughout every major city across the US. These outlaw motorcycle clubs maintained the brotherhood and loyalty of their military past, but applied it to drug trafficking, prostitution, extortion, and murder. Major '1%er' organizations such as the Hell's Angels, Mongols, and Banditos continue to dominate our perception of what a Motorcycle Club is.⁴





American media has been infatuated with biker culture since the 1953 release of The Wild One starring Marlon Brando.¹¹

*“You’re not just cruising. You’re in charge—
kicked back on a throne of machined metal
surveying your domain.”*¹² www.harley-davidson.com



1945 Harley Davidson Solo 45
(Surplus WWII)

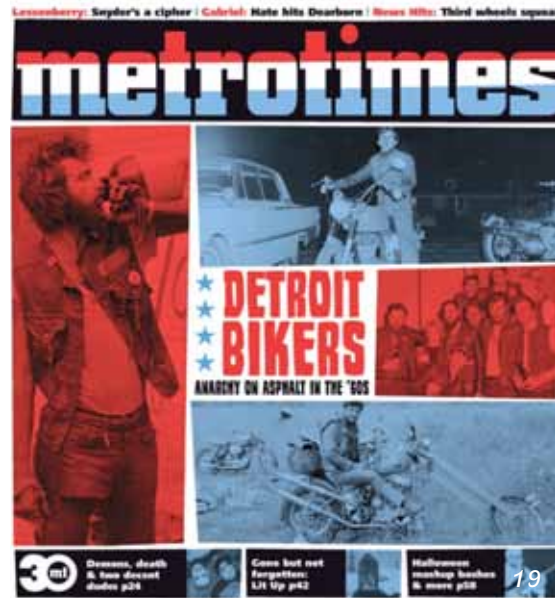


1968 Harley Davidson Panhead



2010 Harley Davidson Softail





Detroit M/C

Detroit is currently home to over 36 motorcycle clubs, with the Highwaymen and Outlaws being the largest. Crime continues to be a major aspect of the majority of these organizations, though not all. On December 8th of 2010, three people were wounded and one person killed during a shooting outside the Wildcats Motorcycle Club.²⁰ In 2007, fourteen members of the Outlaws were arrested on a 18-count indictment alleging various counts of violent crimes, including, murder, racketeering, drugs and

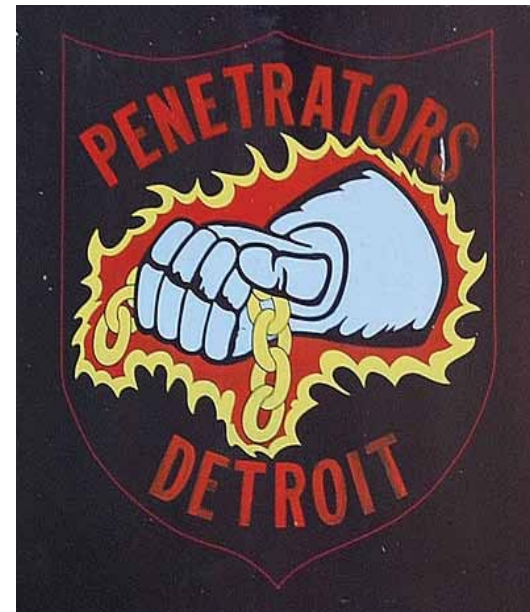
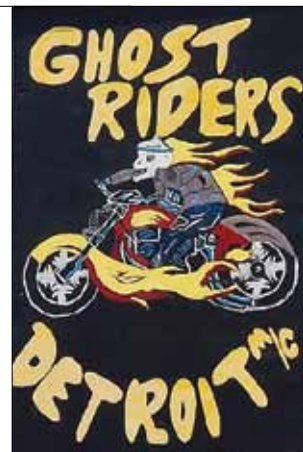
gun violations.²¹ The once mighty Highwaymen have seen over 40 members arrested since 2007 along with the seizure of their headquarters by government officials.

It seems the 'Biker' persona is alive and well...or does it? The turn of the century has seen the motorcycle (Harley-Davidson in particular) normalized by the general public. Lawyers, doctors, and engineers now ride side by side with truckers and factory workers (though they're still easy to spot). Milwaukee Iron is no longer the ultimate expression

of rebellion. Couple this with Michigan's 4 month riding season, and you can take the motorcycle component out of the equation completely. The truth is that the motorcycle is a mere façade for a majority of these clubs, which are nothing more than violent gangs. The legitimacy of the symbols that once defined an outlaw have pushed these groups further and further out to the edges of normal society. Clubs continue to attract military veterans, with membership spikes occurring after WWII, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and the

current Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.²² They are situated in blue collared neighborhoods, correlating to a high dependency on low income communities situated in close proximity to industrial complexes. In relation to law enforcement, a majority of the clubs are located within four major precincts of the Detroit police department (the 6th & 2nd on the west side, and 9th & 11th on the east). Detroit police have recently stepped up efforts to curb the criminal activity of these clubs, however Detroit's past challenges with

crime may have been an attractor for clubs to locate here beginning in the late 60s. The Outlaws, for example, were so enticed by Detroit that they moved their headquarters here in 1984 after being in Chicago for almost 50 years.²³ The 2007 crackdown of the Highwaymen, Detroit's most dangerous club, also saw the indictment of 4 police officers who were tied up with the gang.²⁴ The tougher the town, the greater the respect. Detroit has never been known soft, and neither should those who display the city on their jacket.



The Anatomy of a Motorcycle Clubhouse

350

351

Streetside Security Cameras

Barbed Wire at Parapet

Club Signage

Reinforced Window Openings

CMU Construction

Monochromatic Paint Scheme

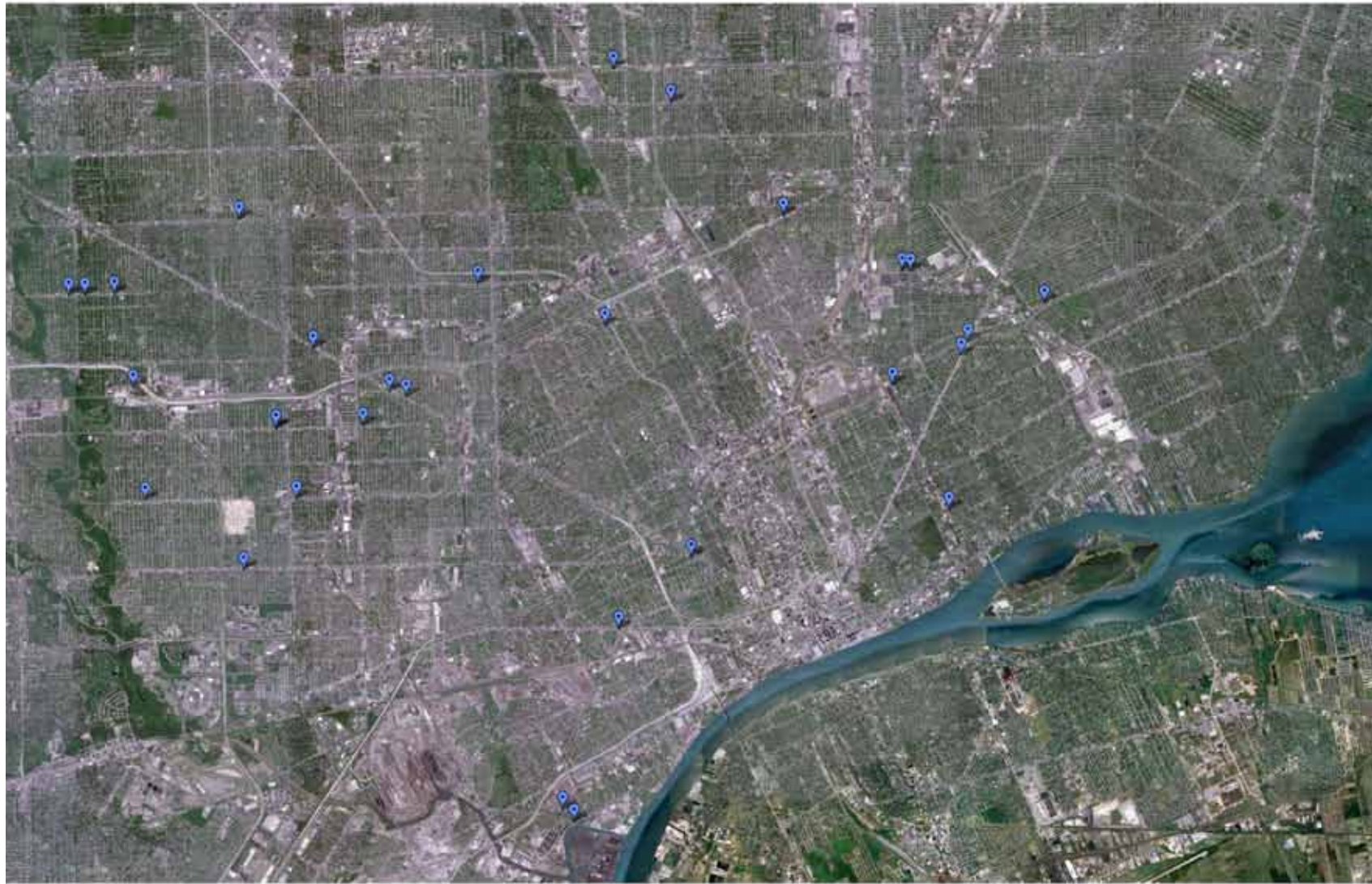
Steel Bars Over Door

Club Name

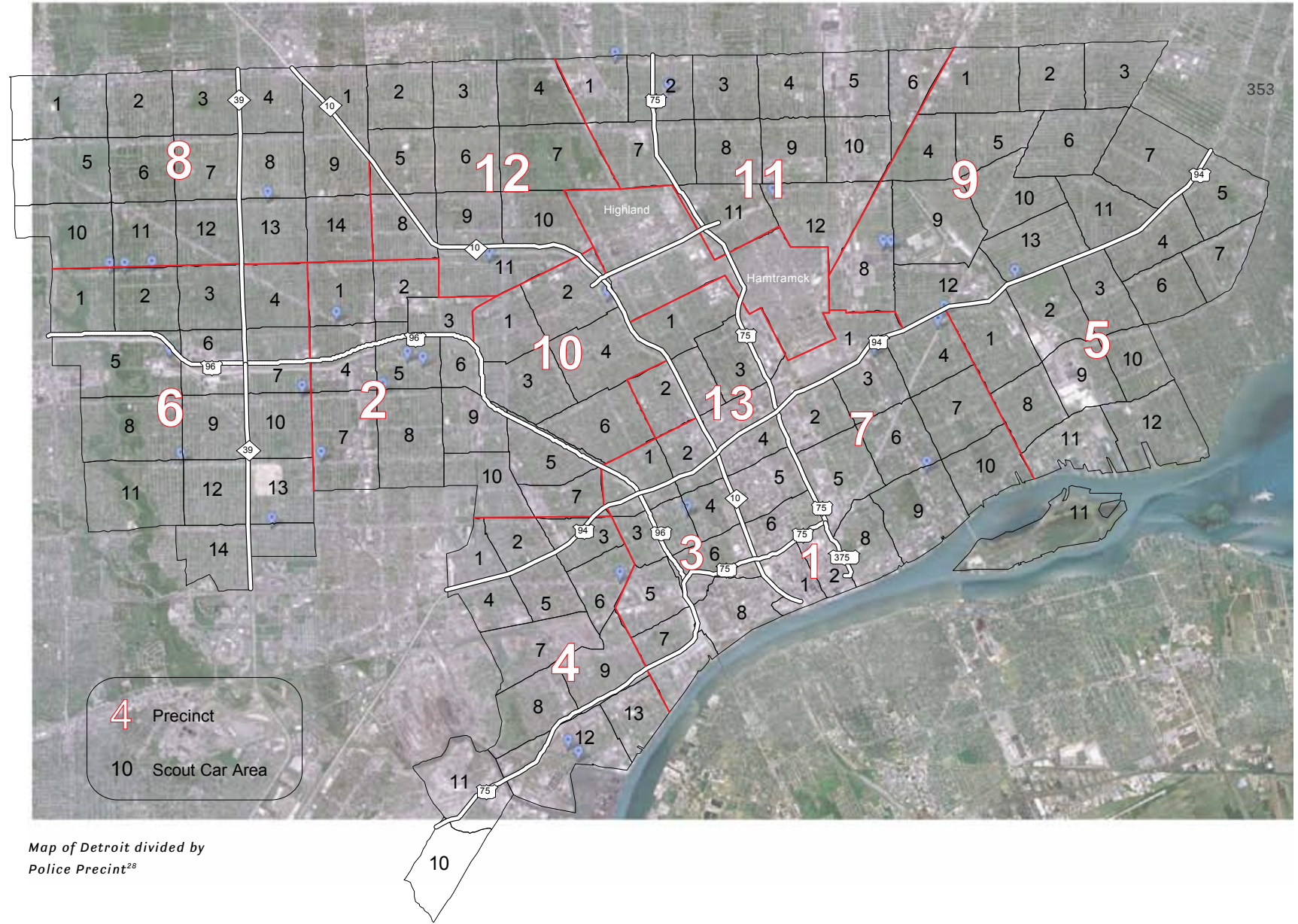
Club Logo

City of Chapter





Map of Detroit with Motorcycle Club locations marked out²⁷



Map of Detroit divided by Police Precinct²⁸

“Outlaw clubs are self regulating. The Major force that prevents the emergence of even more outlaw motorcycle clubs than exist today is not a lack of interest or a shortage of prospective recruits...it is other outlaw clubs.”²⁹

— Daniel R Wolfe

No Clubs Present



14831 Grand River Ave.



12406 Grand River Ave.



12733 Fullerton St.



13344 Plymouth Rd.



15306 Joy Rd.

Precinct 1

Precinct 2



4453 14th St.

Precinct 3



4527 Michigan Ave.

Precinct 4



8434 Dearborn St.



8480 South St.

Precinct 5

No Clubs Present



22131 Fenkell St.

Precinct 6



21607 Fenkell St.



20801 Fenkell St.



12727 Stout St.



16815 W. Warren Ave.



2228 Bellevue St.



6138 Concord St.

Precinct 7



8929 Cratiot Ave.



17118 W. McNichols Rd.



9311 Cratiot Ave.



7521 Lynch Rd.



10320 Van Dyke Ave.



11829 Harper Ave.

Precinct 8

Precinct 9



12721 Woodrow Wilson St.

Precinct 10



319 W. 8 Mile Rd.

Precinct 11



1326 E. State Fair Rd.



4301 E. Davidson St.

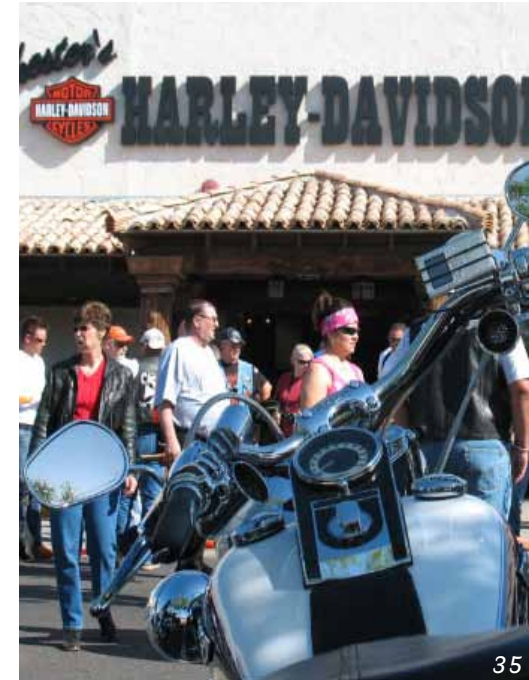


7337 Fenkell St.

Precinct 12

No Clubs Present

Precinct 13



America's dominant motorcycle clubs: the old...

...and the new.

The Outlaws of the 1960s maintained the biker image of danger, camaraderie, and a disregard for the law. The black leather jackets, tattoos, and custom bikes were once a hallmark of those who wished to operate at the fringes of society. Today, those characteristics are just another aspect of mainstream America. Though the motorcycle may have given birth to these groups, the outlaw club is defined more by the crimes they commit than by the bikes they ride. Everything in biker culture is just a facade, on down to the clubhouse with its black exterior, bricked over window openings, and barbed

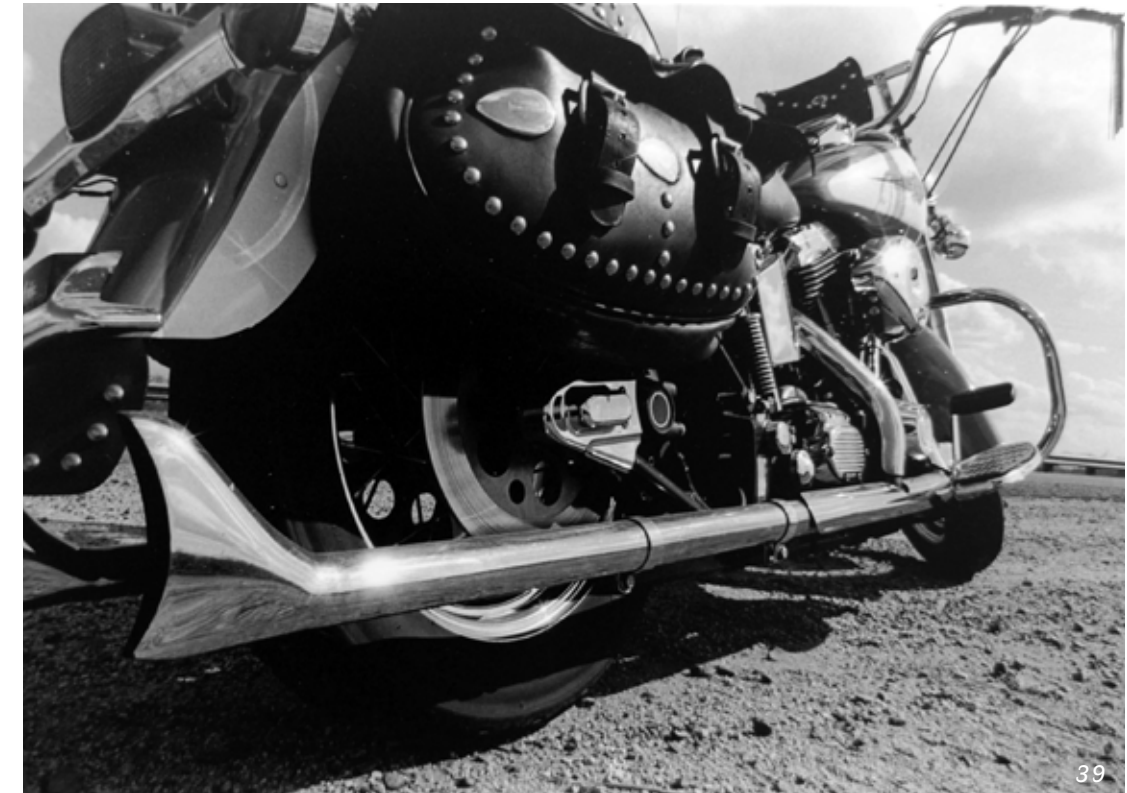
wire coils.

“When the situation calls for it, inter-club rivalry and warfare can completely override the considerations of the common bonds of biking” according to Daniel Wolfe’s investigation into the life of outlaw motorcycle clubs.³⁷ Legitimate motorcycle clubs such as those sponsored by the AMA are left alone on the basis that their existence doesn’t pose a threat of territory to the illegal activities of the outlaw club. The most famous of these clubs is the Harley Owner Group, or HOG, which attend rallies from Daytona to Sturgis. HOG events typically start at a

sponsoring Harley dealership and will end at some participating bar or club, attracting both experienced bikers and prospective customers into showrooms. This does not however give a green light to anyone who wants to wear a black leather jacket and club patch. Outlaw biker emotions remain strong on this point. As a member from the Rebel’s Motorcycle Club in Calgary put it, “The last thing I want is some dipshit on a Honda pulling up beside me wearing a back patch. Fucking embarrassing”.³⁸

Motorcycles will continue to be a large part of outlaw biker gangs throughout

Detroit, as will drugs, violence and a basic existence outside the norms of society. Regardless of what clubs come and go, the motorcycle will remain only as an ancient relic of their self proclaimed rebellion. For those who truly live to ride, a cool summer breeze and an open stretch of highway are all that really matter. Everything else just tends to get in the way.



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