

A DETROIT STORY:

Ideas Whose Time Has Come

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Detroit: City of New Possibilities

The story of land in Detroit is the story of people reimagining productive, compassionate communities. The land, poisoned and abused by industrial capital for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, holds the relics of mass production. As technologies advanced and capital became more mobile, Detroit and its people were abandoned. Yet within this devastation, people began to see the opportunity to create something new. Calling on the deepest resources of memory, spirit, and imagination, abandoned land is being reclaimed as urban gardens; old factories hold the possibilities of aquaponics, art studios, and bicycle production; neighborhoods ravaged by drugs and violence are organizing to create peace zones where people take responsibility for public safety and personal problem solving. Detroit, once the symbol of industrial mass production, holds the possibility of becoming a new kind of self-sufficient, productive, creative, and life-affirming city.

The year 1980 was a turning point in Detroit. For more than two centuries, Detroit had seen steady growth. Colonized by the French in 1701, it began as a small trading fort and gradually evolved into a manufacturing center. In the 1800s, as a port on the Great Lakes and north of the river separating the US from Canada, it became increasingly important for shipping raw materials from forests, mines, and farms; the tanning of leather, and manufacturing bricks, springs, ovens, bicycles, and carriages. At the beginning of the 1900s, it was home to the first Model T automobile. With the Model T came the mass assembly lines that would ultimately drive the industrial power of the city and the nation. By World War II, Detroit was synonymous with industrial might. Within the next decade, however, Detroit began the long, slow slide away from industrial production. Peaking in 1950 with nearly two million people, Detroit began to lose population as deep structural changes altered urban landscapes.

The sources of these interrelated changes are well known. First the end of WWII and the GI bill fostered suburban home ownership. Then, the emerging interstate highway system, the lifting of restrictive home ownership, and increased individual automobile ownership opened suburbs to white working people. At the same time, automation was advancing rapidly, replacing people with machines on the assembly line, creating a growing, permanent underclass. This underclass was increasingly young people of color. Finally, capital was becoming more mobile, leaving the industrial north to open new plants in the southern US and other countries, especially those in the developing world with unorganized labor and little or no safety and environmental protections.

On the national scale, right wing political forces dominated public consciousness. Ronald Regan was swept into the White House on a promise of restoring US military power abroad and the prestige of white men and women at home. At the same time the deindustrialization of Detroit intensified. The automobile industry had taken severe blows with the OPEC oil embargo and an escalating recession. Once a city of nearly two million people, Detroit dropped from the fourth largest city in the US to number six, with barely a million people. Over the next thirty years, this decline in population was to continue, making it the first US city to have reached a million people and then decline below that number.

Today, Detroit is 139 square miles. Its physical footprint could contain all of Manhattan, Boston, and San Francisco. Fully one-third of the land has been abandoned, much of it being reclaimed by the prairie, as wild flowers, pheasants, coyotes, raccoons, opossum, and hawks return to vast sections of open land. The recent recession and foreclosure crisis accelerated this abandonment. At the peak of the crisis, Michigan ranked fifth nationally for foreclosure rates and Detroit was the number one city for foreclosures in the nation with nearly 5 percent of all homes in some stage of foreclosure. Detroit lost 25 percent of its population in just ten years. From 2000 to 2005 Detroit lost nearly 27 percent of its manufacturing jobs.

Detroit's recent bankruptcy filing by Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr acknowledged the reality that our city, which has been abandoned by a million people and thousands of businesses, is not financially viable and must re-imagine and re-invent itself. However, the state-appointed Emergency Manager did not include in his filing the shameful story of how the legislatures of Michigan and other states, which are now controlled by conservatives like the Koch Brothers, have been strip mining

cities by privatizing almost all services, attacking public workers and their unions, while at the same time providing billion dollar tax cuts for large businesses and cutting revenue sharing to the cities.

From Rebellion to Revolution

In 1980, only a few people realized this decline was part of a larger transition in human evolution, as great as the shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture, or from agriculture to industry. Most people were still looking for ways to “reindustrialize” Detroit, to entice jobs and people back into a rapidly emptying landscape.

Prior to 1980, the political work of those of us involved in the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center was shaped by the ideas and practices that flowed from the major social movements of the twentieth century. We were especially influenced by the humanizing questions of Labor, Black Power, Civil Rights, and Feminism. After the uprising in Detroit in 1967, we found it important to make a distinction between rebellion and revolution. We understood rebellion as a righteous uprising, expressing the grievances of people. Revolution, on the other hand, was an effort by people to advance our most human qualities of social responsibility, reflection, care, and compassion. In *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, James and Grace Lee Boggs emphasized the role of revolution in advancing our human capacities. They wrote:

A revolution is not just for the purpose of correcting past injustices. A revolution involves a projection of man/woman into the future. It begins with projecting the notion of a more human human being, i.e., a human being that is more advanced in the specific qualities which only human beings have—creativity, consciousness, and self-consciousness, a sense of political and social responsibility... A revolution is a phase in the long evolutionary process of man/woman. It initiates a new plateau, a new threshold on which human beings can develop, but it is still situated on the continuous line between past and future. It is the result of both a long continuous line between past and future. It is the result both of long preparation and a profoundly new, a profoundly original beginning.¹

¹ James and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 19.

We had already rejected what we saw as static models of revolutionary struggle aimed at seizing the means of production and state power. We were deepening our understanding that the US had become technologically overdeveloped, while being humanly underdeveloped. And we were acutely aware that US capital, able to produce more and more with fewer and fewer people, was entering a new stage.²

Poletown: A Community Betrayed

As we were doing this theoretical work, General Motors announced it would build a new automobile plant in Detroit. The proposed site of the plant encompassed the old Dodge Main complex owned by Chrysler. Once one of the largest industrial plants in the world, employing over forty-five thousand people during World War II and through the mid-1960s. Dodge Main closed in 1979 with less than two-thousand workers. Like many old factories in Detroit, it was abandoned. No one could afford to tear it down. GM soon bought the entire 135-acre facility for \$1, and used it as a corner stone for its new plant. Plans for the new plant included an additional 330 acres, most of it inhabited by people living in small, working-class homes that had evolved over the years to support Dodge Main.

Over the next year an intense struggle ensued, with the residents of what was called Poletown organizing to oppose the sacrifice of their community to a private corporation. General Motors, Mayor Coleman Young, and the Detroit City Council, operated under the authority of a new Michigan “Quick Take” law that allowed local governments to seize private property and give it to another private party for a public purpose. In this case, the “public purpose” was the promise of 6,500 jobs.

The dimensions of the Quick Take were staggering. The City agreed to clear 465 acres. This included flattening 1,500 homes, 144 businesses, sixteen churches, a school, and a hospital. About 3,500 people were forced out so that the land could be turned over to GM for its new Cadillac plant.

At first, neighbors organized resistance through letter-writing campaigns, public meetings, and demonstrations, including the bashing of a GM car in front of its world headquarters. Ralph Nader, fresh from his victories challenging GM safety violations, agreed to join the

2 Ibid.

Neighborhood Council, and sent a team of organizers helping to challenge the Quick Take Law in court.

But the forces against the residents were too great, the appeal for jobs too urgent. GM and the City were joined by the UAW, the Arch Diocese, and the local media, claiming that the destruction of the neighborhood was essential to progress and jobs. There was no alternative, they declared. Ultimately, even the occupation of the Immaculate Conception Church by neighbors, supporters, and several elderly Polish women could not stop the wrecking balls. After enduring withdrawal of city services, including police protection and garbage pick up, as well as a series of arsons set by thugs encouraged by the City, the court challenge was lost. In 1981 the Michigan Supreme Court approved the forced relocation and sale of lands, removing the last legal barrier to development.

The destruction of Poletown caused us to think more deeply about what was happening in our city. Our earlier hope that black political power would provide the impetus for new, more human forms of development was clearly mistaken. Grace Lee Boggs summed up our assessment when she said, "The whole Poletown Fiasco was a very dramatic example of destroying a community in a futile effort to bring back the past."³

Post-Industrial Era: New American Dream

We began to understand that Detroit, once the epitome of industrial society, was now in the forefront of the newly emerging post-industrial era. Central to that new era was the use and abuse of land.

Facing rising unemployment and continued deterioration of the community during the 1980s, we began to organize among people who were locked out of any possibility of productive jobs. Through the Michigan Committee to Organize the Unemployed, we protested forced overtime and deepened our understanding that twentieth-century America was "a society in which the trade of lives for dollars has become the essential bargain and has come to define the American Dream."⁴

The people coming to our meetings were less and less concerned

3 Jeanie Wylie, *Poletown: A Community Betrayed* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 109.

4 Richard Feldman and Michael Betzold, *End of the Line: Autoworkers and the American Dream* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

about what was happening in the plants and more and more concerned about the loss of humanity in the community. For them, the symbol of this inhumanity was the “cheese lines” where the federal government distributed surplus food once a month. The distribution took place on one day per month at four centers around the city, each center attracting fifteen- to twenty-thousand people. People would line up the day before, even in the snow, for the food. A survival-of-the-fittest mentality ruled. At organizing meetings, people told stories of elders being knocked over, people in wheel chairs being pushed aside, and young men stealing from mothers and children to resell food on the black market. Soon it became apparent that the community was our primary focus. Reflecting our growing consciousness of the need to transform our communities, by 1985 we had renamed our group Detroiters for Dignity.

The first task Detroiters for Dignity assumed was to change the free food distribution system. We began asking the distribution centers to simply add one additional day for distribution and to divide up the recipients alphabetically. We offered to organize volunteers to help maintain peaceful relationships and to assist in the packing and distribution. All of our proposed changes were soundly rejected, first by city administrators of the programs, and then by Mayor Young who had us forcefully removed from his office. Ultimately, the City Council invited Detroiters for Dignity to testify at one of their meetings about the conditions on the cheese lines. The emotional descriptions, especially that given by Geneva Smith, led to City Council action to reform the distribution system, including setting in place a cadre of volunteers to deliver food to the elderly and people with limited mobility. This hard-fought victory positioned Detroiters for Dignity as a voice for human values in the city.

From this perspective, we became involved in two related concerns: the increasing youth violence, due to the emergence of crack cocaine, and efforts by the Young administration to bring casino gambling to the city. Detroiters for Dignity joined to support the newly emerging organization, Save our Sons and Daughters (SOSAD) in 1986. Organized by Clementine Barfield and Vera Ruckers, SOSAD was an effort to transform the grief of parents who had lost children to gun violence into a positive force for peace. Also as crack dealers began to change the character of neighborhoods, we joined with WePros (We the People Reclaim Our Streets), marching weekly to draw attention to crack houses. In one neighborhood our persistent weekly marches reduced crime 80 percent.

These neighborhood organizations joined together with faith-based groups, city council members, and community leaders to oppose Coleman Young when he announced that his next effort for creating jobs in the city would be casino gambling. Thus, we formed Detroiters Uniting.

Revolution, Transformation, Reimagining Community

It was this growing experience within community-based struggles that deepened our understanding of revolution as a transformation of ourselves as we struggled to transform and create new systems for work, for safety, for education, and for play. Mayor Young, furious at our opposition to his plans, called us a bunch of “naysayers” and challenged us by asking, “What is your alternative?” We knew that alternative forms of development needed to emerge if the community was to take charge of its own future.

Central to these alternatives was the recognition that no one else was going to solve our problems but us. In Detroiters Uniting we said, “We are convinced that we cannot depend upon one industry or one large corporation to provide us with jobs. It is now up to us—the citizens of Detroit—to put our hearts, our imaginations, our minds, and our hands together to create a vision and project concrete programs for developing the kinds of local enterprises that will provide meaningful jobs and income for all citizens.”⁵

Recognizing it was up to us opened up new ways of thinking about the city. As we began to explore alternative paths for developing ways of living outside of industrial capital, we were able to see more clearly that much of what industrial capital had discarded and disrespected—young people, elders, and the land—held the potential for rebirth.

Our thinking during this period was very influenced by the work of ecofeminists, especially Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, and Starhawk.

This theoretical work was deepened by our experiences in the community, especially the older women who still remembered community life. Most of them, having migrated to Detroit in the 1930s and 1940s, brought with them the memory of communities that had endured and survived the Jim Crow South. We were beginning to see that in post-industrial cities, building community—transforming ourselves as we transformed our institutions—was essential to revolutionary change. In 1963, James Boggs wrote,

5 James and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution*, 10–11.

Up to now we have not depended upon ourselves to build community. But now that corporations are abandoning and destroying our communities it is up to us to build community. That means we need a two-pronged approach. On the one hand we must resist the efforts of the corporations to destroy our communities by closing down our places of work and of the urban planners who are working for the mayor to turn Detroit into a tourist center and develop the riverfront to lure back those folks who have abandoned the city...but at the same time we must be building the communities necessary for the human identity of ourselves and our children.⁶

As he said later, building community depended on our “continuing faith in people, even when all around us we see so many of our brothers and sisters without faith, without hope, and living such empty lives.”⁷

Building Alternatives

Out of this faith, and drawing on this experience of more than a decade of community-based organizing that aimed to raise questions of how we value one another—how we create bonds of community and restore local economies—we launched Detroit Summer in 1992. We had come to understand that young people were not “problems to be solved,” but held the solutions to many of the problems we faced. By challenging them to use their skill, imagination, vision, and heart to help rebuild the city, they would also be able to develop themselves.⁸

Critical to Detroit Summer was the idea of urban gardening. Under the influence of Gerald Hairston, a lifelong Detroiter, master gardener, and community activist, we began to see that land, abandoned by capital, was a new opportunity. It provided the space to begin to redevelop our communities by providing for our most basic necessities. As Gerald liked to say, “A city that feeds itself, frees itself.”

Gerald had been the main support for the then-fledgling urban gardening movement that was begun by elderly women who had mostly migrated from the South to Detroit during the 1940s and '50s. These

6 James Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963), 334.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 113.

women, watching neighbors leave, saw the space left behind not as vacant, abandoned property, but as open land offering new garden space. Throughout the 1980s, with the encouragement of the Detroit Farm a Lot program run by the city, and tools lent out through local libraries, small groups of women began turning vacant lots into flourishing gardens. Some of these expanded, long-standing backyard plots were started generations ago by Detroit residents reluctant to abandon their rural ways. Sometimes they were efforts to keep community memory alive, as with Lillian Clark who organized her neighbors to capture the perennials planted throughout their neighborhood to mark family occasions. Rosebushes for anniversaries; apple trees for graduations. Lilacs for the birth of child were lovely, rescued from abandonment and replanted in the memory garden with the hope that one day the plant and its story could be passed on to new families. Most often, gardens were to provide food for families and neighbors.

When Detroit Summer began, Gerald Hairston estimated there were around 130 such gardens. Over the next twenty years, the urban garden movement came to dominate the Detroit Landscape, putting Detroit in the forefront of a new global movement to reimagine cities as self-sufficient and self-sustaining. Studies currently predict that Detroit has the capacity, with the addition of hoop houses, to provide 75 percent of all the vegetables and 40 percent of all the fruits it would need to survive well.

Through these efforts, we realized that creating gardens was also recreating community, uniting neighbors across generations. In a recent article by Jose Flores, we get a picture of the solutions that are emerging out of our efforts to create community. Mr. Flores writes of his conversation with Rick Feldman:

At the old abandoned Packard plant just outside downtown Detroit, Feldman reflects: "It's the end of the economic American dream, which was also very destructive. On one level we have to grieve, but we also have to welcome it. Now we can move on to create another kind of American dream that is based on quality of life versus a standard of living."

Out of necessity, the people of Detroit are shaping alternatives to the urban wreckage left by the collapse of the auto industry. And new possibilities are emerging across the city: Eastside residents have

transformed their neighborhood into an outdoor public art exhibit with waste materials collected from vacant lots. Just a short drive away, a group has purchased storefronts, planted fruit trees along a few city blocks, and renamed the area “Hope District.” Elsewhere, another group has reclaimed two acres of unused and underutilized land in the city to grow produce that feeds community members. In short, the movement in Detroit is putting forth a model for creating solutions rooted in frontline communities and place-based relationships.⁹

Growing Freedom

According to Tyrone Thompson of Freedom Freedom Growers, urban agriculture can work to heal people from the alienating nature of wage labor. Because Freedom Freedom’s work is not exploitative, workers are freed up to think about the purpose of work in different ways. In comparison to wage labor, Tyrone describes his work at Freedom Freedom as physically tiring, but adds that, “spiritually it refills you. It’s rejuvenative. It has medicinal power. You grow stronger, and more diligent, the more you work out there.” Working in agriculture, Tyrone says, “you can go take a nap and be sweet afterward, then go back and do your thing. You got to take vacations from your 9–5 plantation job to spend time with your family and enjoy life. Then you go back out there and do your thing out there. But here, shit, every day is a vacation. You go and do your work, you eat good, spend time with your family working, you go to sleep and wake up and you look forward to doing it.”

Freed from alienating labor, human beings become aware of their capacity to create and experience the type of freedom that allows them to experience revolutions in their values and identities. In a clear example of how this kind of work facilitates changes in consciousness, Myrtle Thompson of Freedom Freedom says that working in urban agriculture taught her to completely reconstruct her understanding of time, spirituality, and nature, because she began to see that the earth is not made of dirt, but is made of soil. Farming has taught her biology, geography, and broadened her understanding of human consciousness. According to Myrtle, “All these things we’ve put aside by just going to the grocery store and getting some food wake up in you.”

⁹ Jose Flores, “Detroiters Find ‘Way!’ Out of No Way,” *Weaving the Threads* 17, no. 2 (2010).

Because she saw that she could create food that was better for her than food she could buy in a store, she eventually quit her job as a cook. There she would make something for someone and think, “you don’t really want to be eating this.”

Simultaneously she began to recruit youth to participate in Freedom Freedom because the process of growing and consuming locally produced food “is much better for them, physically, spiritually, mentally, environmentally, the whole nine yards.” Adding, “When you know better, you should do better,” and that “sometimes its hard to shake that off because we are so conditioned.”

Myrtle is not alone. According to Monique Thompson, by “working in the garden, the saying, that who doesn’t work doesn’t eat, really came to life.” This realization helped her understand that she is connected to people throughout the world. Everything that goes into getting food on the table,” Monique asks, “who’s doing this for me when I go to the grocery store and get it, and what do I owe them?”

Understanding Freedom Freedom’s farm as something like a liberated zone, organizer Wayne Curtis declared, “This is our environment that we are able to develop and grow in... The youth that are participating in this process, when they get older maybe they won’t be suffering from the same psychological idiosyncrasies that we have now.”

Struggle Over Different Visions

These community-based efforts have been able to grow, because land throughout the city was not contested. The sheer magnitude of abandonment overwhelmed city administrations. Until recently. Within the last few years a new coordinated effort by business, foundations, and government has emerged to take over land and reshape the city.

In 2009, Detroit elected Dave Bing as mayor. A former basketball player with no government experience, Bing promised a mature, business-like approach to government. Exhausted and embarrassed by the sex scandals and bad boy attitude of former-Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, Detroiters looked forward to a new era of cooperative no-nonsense government.

Shortly after his election, however, Mayor Bing announced a new initiative. In response to the loss of population and abandoned houses, he wanted to “shrink the city.” In February of 2010, Mayor Bing made an almost off-hand comment on a conservative radio show that he planned

to force residents from sparsely populated areas out of their homes by cutting city services to them.

He said, "There is just too much land and too many expenses for us to continue to manage the city as we have in the past. There are tough decisions that are going to have to be made. There will be winners and losers, but in the end we've got to do what's right for the city's future."

This announcement was met with a huge outcry within the city. Images of Poletown and the devastation of countless "urban renewal" projects (including the destruction of Hastings Street, the heart of the thriving African-American community in the 1930s and '40s, the leveling of China Town, and the division of the Latin-American community in Southwest Detroit) surfaced in the collective memory of the city as a powerful indictment of the Mayor's plan.

Meanwhile, the foundations, especially Kresge, Kellogg, Ford, and Skilman announced the Detroit Works Project. Clearly aligned with the Mayor, business interests, and the newly appointed state emergency manager of the schools, the Detroit Works Project, set about getting citizen consent for the plan to shrink the city.

The first meeting of Detroit Works was attended by over a thousand people, the vast majority angry and upset. Efforts by the organizers to break the meeting into small groups were rejected by those attending. After a year of these gatherings, almost everyone agreed that the Detroit Works effort had failed to garner any support. In fact, it was widely assumed that the high-paid consultant brought in to lead the team would be removed, and the project rethought.

However, by the spring of 2011 Detroit Works reinvented itself. In the hands of a well-respected local planner, Dan Pitera, Detroit Works was recast, first as a public short-term planning process, then as long-term process with the charge of producing a plan to reshape the city by August 2012.

This process appears to be little more than a public-relations stunt, for while the "engagement" continues, the mayor announced the dimensions of his shrinking effort.

On May 20, 2012, the combined *Detroit News* and *Free Press* published the mayor's latest plan to reshape the city by concentrating services in selected areas. About one quarter of the city was labeled distressed. Introducing the plan to shut off services, the article began, "The city of Detroit can no longer afford to give the same services to all areas.

Neighborhoods now are ranked according to a market type that will determine which city service an area receives. Among the factors considered are how many people live in the neighborhood, the number of bank-owned houses, and whether there are stores, schools and other amenities.”

This was followed by an editorial endorsing aggressive action against residents in the “distressed neighborhoods,” saying, “Now that its de facto triage process is public, it can only behoove the city to make sure residents understand as clearly as possible the likely destiny of their own neighborhoods. The campaign to cajole, entice or otherwise redeploy Detroiters to more densely populated neighborhoods is certain to meet resistance, and spawn occasional injustices. But in the long run it is the only path forward.”¹⁰

In contrast to this mainstream media cheerleading, we wrote a response in the *Michigan Citizen*. There we said: “To anyone who has been following city development over the last few years, this was no surprise. It is exactly the plan everyone knew was coming. It clearly intends to free up land on the east side of the city, now openly talked about by developers as the next opportunity for them.”¹¹

This plan is completely illegitimate, and quite possibly illegal. It is nothing short of a declaration of war on neighborhoods. It did not emerge from any citizen process. It was never presented in any public meeting, and it is hard to believe that even in this weak and often misguided City Council there would a majority of members callous enough to support it.

The essence of the plan is the forced removal of people from their homes. Even the *Detroit News* had to acknowledge this in its lead paragraph about the plan. It said, “The city is trying to encourage—or push—people out of rundown neighborhoods that are largely vacant.”¹² How will it “encourage or push” them? By cutting off services. The services being “stopped” are street lights, which haven’t been on in many neighborhoods for years; tree trimming; removal of abandoned houses, a process that continues at a glacial pace even the best of neighborhoods; and police services, whose absence might not be noticed. The city is vague about what it intends to do with water, fire protection, garbage pick up,

10 “Editorial: No Improvement without movement in Detroit’s stressed neighborhoods,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 22, 2012.

11 Shea Howell, “Disaster plan,” *The Boggs Blog*, May 27–June 2, 2012.

12 Cecil Angel, “In Detroit’s distressed areas, the neighbors left, and now services disappear,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 20, 2012.

and basic sanitation. If past history is any guide, these, too, are likely to be cut off. Certainly that was the strategy used in what is now widely considered one of the most shameful episodes in city development, the destruction of Poletown. Folks living in the neighborhoods targeted for clearance would do well to learn the lessons from that effort, and begin immediately to develop local safety and support organizations to resist the plan to force them out, house by house.

Behind all of this is the effort by the city to evade using eminent domain, made more difficult thanks to the residents of Poletown, who attempted to ensure that what happened to them would not happen to anyone else. After years of court battles and legislative effort, the city cannot simply declare areas cleared for development. Further, the city cannot take homes without fair compensation. In other words, it's a lot cheaper to try to drive people out than to legally take property for public purpose.

Every one who cares about the future of our city should reject this inhumane, vicious plan. How dare public officials and their appointees declare war on the poorest, most elderly among us? How dare they think a city that denies aid to elders is a city anyone thinks is worth living in? How dare foundations and corporate interests who are orchestrating this plan for their own benefit pretend they are interested in our people?

The mayor told the truth about one thing. He didn't have a plan. He had a declaration of war on the poor. All of us who care about the future of our city need to make clear that the only plans acceptable for our future begin with the recognition that every life is valuable, every home is sacred. The mayor's plan is a disaster.

Clearly, two very distinct visions of the future of Detroit are emerging. On the one hand the business-foundation-government view sees a smaller, whiter, wealthier city, with more small businesses designed to cater to the workers of large corporations and privatized city services. Their nod to urban agriculture appears to be some urbanized version of large-scale, industrial farms on the land that was once populated by the poorest among us.

The other vision is the one that has been slowly, but surely, emerging for decades as people are choosing to live, work, and play in new cooperative and life affirming ways. Rebecca Solnit, visiting Detroit shortly before these latest struggles, saw the hope and possibility of a different kind of city. She wrote:

It is here where European settlement began in the region, that we may be seeing the first signs of an unsettling of the very promises of colonial expansion, an unsettling that may bring a complex new human and natural ecology into being.

This is the most extreme and long-term hope Detroit offers us: the hope that we can reclaim what we paved over and poisoned, that nature will not punish us, that it will welcome us home—not with the landscape that was here where we arrived, perhaps but with land that is alive, lush and varied all the same....Detroit is a harsh place of poverty, deprivation and a fair amount of crime, but it also a stronghold of possibility.¹³

That “stronghold of possibility” has deep roots now throughout our community. We will not be moved.

13 Rebecca Solnit, “Detroit Arcadia: Exploring the Post-American Landscape,” *Harpers Magazine* (July 2007): 73.