

summer 2017 | Issue Three

RIVERWISE

trust the current, hold fast to one another





Photo by Marisol Teachwort

Self-Portrait

BY ANGELA JONES

Sistah be riding her bike in Detroit
 From the eves of Eight Mile
 To the Gideon of Grand River
 Detroit, D-town, De Trois, Of three
 These streets are her trinity
 8mile the father- Livernois the son-
 Grand River her holy ghost

Pedaling past parking structures
 and sidewalk preachers
 Dodging broken glass like bullets
 To keep from puncturing her tires,
 Tired with mobility, with movement
 'Cause all that matters is motion
 Using her tires to keep afloat
 So she won't sink into quicksand cement
 Like sidewalks that swallow you whole
 If you don't keep pedaling

So sistah be pumping fast past the past
 Using the speed of her ride
 To escape from that great divide
 That strip that separates the white folk
 From the West Side
 That un-imaginary line
 Where the war of North and South is still fought
 With exhaust fumes of factory lines
 And the flames from 67 fires

It's a 1-way route 2 further racial aggression
 Within 3 bodies of water 4 which we live,
 Work, judge, hate, bottle, package, and sell
 In a 5 day work week
 But I have a 6th sense
 That the only way we'll make it
 To the 7th generation
 Is if we put these last 8 miles behind us

So sistah be pedaling fast past the past
 Cruising down Livernois
 Cause that's all that people can do: Live
 When rotting buildings and empty lots
 Are constant reminders
 Of how the dead haunt this city

So sistah be pedaling down Livernois
 Cause that's all that people are: Livin' noise
 Persons- of sound
 Rhythm in movement
 Masters of motion
 And people be makin' some noise in this city
 Raisin' hell in this city
 Like ancestors before
 Quick jabs and daily scabs can't quiet us

And sistah be makin' mad noise on that bike
 With Walkman wailing
 Never halting at heads turning
 Rubber burning
 She don't wear no protective gear
 Cause sistah ain't got no fear of her streets
 Just the price of living getting' higher
 And the occasional flat tire

But the edge of the shore is a sure
 sign of salvation
 In this desert D
 Cause sistah be pedaling down Grand River
 Shallow and deep, still and raging
 She rejoices when she reaches the water
 The blood of 22mil consecrated martyrs
 On this surface of loss, Jesus just walked
 But sistah, she be gliding across
 Like 747s in the sky
 Or skateboarders in July

This river ain't a river of oil spills or showboats
 Slaves came from hell for a chance
 To cross this moat
 Then some got sent back
 Now, tell me...
 How do you bury that betrayal?
 How can you resist resentment?

You pedal past it

With all the muscle in your calves
 With all the strength in your soul
 Try to fill in the holes of a sadist system
 Without becoming sadist yourself

See, Grand River ain't made
 From asphalt or H2O
 It's a concept conceived in the mind
 It tries to bind history to the present
 So we know that it's still relevant

So sistah be pedaling fast past the past
 Carrying visions of it with her
 To the next street, to fend off defeat
 Remembering is her mobility
 An added fourth to her trinity
 And right at the starting line
 Of her spiritual coast

Is 8mile the father- Livernois the son-
 Grand River her holy ghost

A Choice Between Two Worlds

RIVERWISE EDITORIAL BOARD

On Detroit's west side, near the corner of Wisconsin and Fullerton, Linda Gadsden has diligently been recovering native plants from vacant lots and transplanting them in her community garden. The seasonal wildflower preserve she has cultivated on a previously open lot is a forward step in the evolution of the urban agriculture movement in Detroit. Her four-season garden plots emphasize the ability of the earth to provide for us year-round. Additionally, she has integrated her garden with the curriculum at Noble Elementary School. The 'Noble Open Classroom' will allow students to study the natural world in the context of their own neighborhood. Gadsden is prone to telling stories about the path that specific plants took to get to her garden and how they are faring there. For example, the root system of the white roses, she tells folks, have a tendency to grow outward, parallel to the surface, in search of suitable areas to sprout.

In another part of town, the gilded side, Dan Gilbert has been planting things too. A high-speed fiber-optic cable underneath Woodward was buried while the street was dug up for installation of the QLine tracks. Now, some are wondering if the QLine was just the public relations part of a grander scheme to persuade tech companies to relocate to Detroit. If so, we have to look at the QLine as more than just another missed opportunity to improve public transportation. More accurately, it's a devious ploy in the effort to expropriate public funds and city land.

It's a long way from the wandering roots of Linda Gadsden's white roses to the fiber-optic cables burrowing underneath Gilbert's Woodward Avenue—beneath the surface, these two complex systems are seeking out ways to remain a permanent part of the social landscape. They're taking different paths toward two distinct versions of the future. One is carving out an exclusive space in the city for private industry and technology, the other is attempting to establish a 'space to begin anew' based on values of community and sustainability. The decisions as to which future will become the foundation for our city is up to us.

The *Riverwise* Summer 2017 issue presents several stories by activists engaged in work that is pushing us towards futures that are

inclusive, value-based and attentive to our environment. In addition to Linda Gadsden's garden, which offers praise to the seasons and the neighborhood wildflowers, Hope House's Naim Edwards gives us a tour of the plant sanctuary he has designed and cultivated near the Brightmoor district. This garden incorporates a wildflower sanctuary situated along the properties' outer edge, and a rain garden for naturally controlling water run-off into storm drains. Edwards has also planted a diverse array of vegetables and fruits. By integrating his work with the specific landscape around him, Edwards is making a lasting impression on the land and the community.

According to the Greening of Detroit, an estimated 20,000 Detroiters are part of the urban agriculture movement. Those numbers indicate, not just increased participation, but an increase in diversity of garden techniques and strategies. Planting to reconstitute the soil and to feed the community has given way to cultivating native species and diversifying the output. Gardening is moving from growing to eat and cut costs primarily, to also providing a way to repair our relationships to one another and the earth that sustains us.

These gardens preserving native species and incorporating environmental remediation have

had a transformative effect on the people around them. The process of reimagining wildflowers as the assets they once were has brightened neighbors' outlook on their immediate surroundings. Plants that were often considered 'weeds' are now examples of the beauty and healing that exist on previously neglected lots. That fundamental change in perspective serves to heighten our consciousness and encourage participation. These dedicated efforts, by groups and individuals, are guided by long-term investments in the ecology of the neighborhood. Witness Linda Gadsden and her family of volunteers haul five-gallon buckets of water over a city block to the Familyhood Inc. garden when the soil is dry.

The diversity of locations where you'll find gardens and support for local agriculture is also expanding. As one shining example, the children and teachers of the Detroit Independent Freedom Schools movement have constructed a raised-bed vegetable garden on the patio of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History. The museum's support of this project has been consistent with its push to be a center for community engagement in addition to a source of programming dedicated to social justice.

In our brief lifespan, *Riverwise* has evolved from its original mission to, 'tell stories about the grassroots activism changing lives in historical neighborhoods.' We quickly realized the power of stories being told by the people themselves. Speaking in our own voices about our own experiences carries more weight because it heightens the consciousness of both the storyteller and the listener. Activists writing their own stories present varied and more nuanced voices—not only in tone but in style.

The capacity of stories to change us is exemplified wonderfully in the Pedal To Porch program initiated by Core City native, Cornetta Lane. Pedal To Porch brings participants out of their homes and onto their porches, which are perfect backdrops for the occasion. The ancient craft of storytelling lifts participants into new ways of understanding, teaching us that we are shaping

our past, present and futures as we talk together. Claiming our own stories is an act of power and resistance to those who speculate on our lives.

This issue of *Riverwise* provides more contributions from the people consciously reimagining and reorganizing society from the ground up. It's an approach we've been promoting more during our *Riverwise* Community Conversations. Our June 24 conversation across from the gardens of Freedom Freedom led to a request that we incorporate some version of a writer's workshop to help beginning writers tell their stories.

Multi-disciplinarian artist and visionary, Halima Cassells, describes her path to economic liberation through the Detroit Free Market. Cassells is working at the grassroots level to stem the tide of consumerism and material-based values by introducing the community to effective practices of trading and sharing to meet basic needs.

Our portrait presentation of members of the Homrich 9 draws inspiration from their act of civil disobedience to affirm that water is a human right. Their individual statements on the power of civil disobedience, which for them included three years of delays by the prosecution and the courts, reveal the power of personal commitment and sacrifice.

In keeping with this edition's attention to native flowers, and native species, and the roots of Detroit, artist Ash Arder contributed photos of her sculpture series based on foraged stinging nettle plants and the fiber



she produces from them. Her work also takes from an ancient tradition and uses it to visually project us into the future.

Here in Detroit and across the U.S., the doors to corporate success have been flung open by State-imposed financial takeovers. Real estate speculators and venture capitalists are free from the constraints of democratic institutions and public input. Dan Gilbert has planted his flag firmly and in full view on Woodward Avenue. A long list of startup tech companies are waiting to sign up. But miles from Woodward, out of view of the cameras, the seeds of (r)evolution are being planted in vacant and occupied lots dotting historic neighborhoods.

In his recent presentation at the Charles H. Wright Museum, author/historian, Gerald Horne, emphasized the State's continued retribution towards our city for the city's historic role in Black liberation politics or, what he called, "Rebellion at the point of production."

That legacy of revolution and rebellion burrowed deep in the African-American experience is now finding its way back to the surface through the roots of Linda Gadsden's roses. This issue of *Riverwise* is dedicated to those who are seeking new ways to restore, reclaim and rebuild our lives in this place we call Detroit.



Photos by Leah Duncan

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PRINTING SERVICES
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SUBSCRIPTIONS/DONATIONS:
"Riverwise magazine is partially grant-funded but we need your help in order to remain at the newsstands free of charge advertisement-free. We urge you to donate or subscribe to Riverwise by returning the envelope attached to this issue, or visit our donation page at www.riverwisedetroit.org."

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Mission Statement

WHO

'Riverwise' is a community-based magazine created by a team of authors, writers, photojournalists, parents, grandparents, students, organizers, activists, artists, educators and visionaries.

We are working together to create media that reflects local activism and the profound new work being done in and around Detroit neighborhoods.

We envision deepening relationships through media that serves as an essential part of weaving beloved communities.

We will celebrate personal Detroit stories and the process of evolving ideas.

WHY

It is often said that we live in two Detroits—one affluent, the other neglected. We know there are many versions of Detroit and in some communities there is a striving toward self-determination and new, visionary ways of life. It is our goal through this publication to show these efforts that are rooted in community, sustainable, transformative and based upon new forms of citizenship.

Detroit is a movement city. And our movements need creative media. By sharing resources and encouraging open participation of engaged citizens, especially people of color, 'Riverwise' shall help us to examine our

own personal and political contradictions and generate lasting solutions.

WHAT WE NEED

'Riverwise' needs your stories of resilience, visionary resistance, place-based education, self-determination and sustainable, creative ways of transforming yourselves and your communities.

Please contact us with article ideas and notice of programs taking place in your neighborhood. We'll do our best to follow up.

Or submit an article, personal anecdote, poem, interview, photo, or illustration of your own for our next edition of 'Riverwise' by October 1, 2017. We will do what we can to tell your stories. We won't be able to print them all. Some articles may also be printed in the Living For Change Newsletter put out by the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership. Submissions should not be more than 1,500 words long and may be edited for content and/or space. They should also include contact information and proper credits and affiliations.

The Riverwise collective also invites you to join us for a series of community conversations. We hope to regularly discuss the direction of the magazine, story ideas and the future of our emerging Detroit communities with all interested parties. Please refer to the community calendar in this issue or the community conversation page at www.riverwisedetroit.org for more details.

Riverwise quarterly magazine is a non-profit venture is distributed as a free publication, printed without paid advertisements. Although we've been afforded the resources, many volunteer-based, to commence publication, we need your support in the form of donations and/or subscriptions in order to sustain our efforts and grow.

Please fill out the attached subscription card/envelope and let us know how much you appreciate Riverwise in the form of a monetary donation that fits your current ability to pay.

You may also contribute through the donation page at our website, www.riverwisedetroit.org.

We thank you for your consideration and your help mapping the future.

In love and struggle,
The Riverwise Collective



Photo by Kelvin Lundy



Gilbert's Trojan Horse: Capturing the City Core

BY ANTONIO RAFAEL
AND MATTHEW IRWIN

Local activists and pundits have, rightfully, ridiculed Detroit's new downtown streetcar, the QLINE, also known as the M-1 Rail. It covers only three miles of prime real estate (only 5 percent of the city), stands apart from a larger rapid transit plan, serves sports fans and tourists, and relies on outdated technology that has proven unreliable in other cities. The project also went about \$40 million over budget, and covers the same route as the Woodward Ave. bus, which

actually goes much faster. The QLINE's intended public clearly is not the 26 percent of Detroit residents who don't have cars.

Less prevalent in local debate is what lies beneath the QLINE—namely, the intention to develop Detroit as a Third Coast Silicon Valley by Detroit's very own white savior, Dan Gilbert. The Quicken Loans founder and real estate mogul, whose lending practices helped to propel Detroit's financial crisis, used the QLINE to install Rocket Fiber, Detroit's first

gigabit internet provider. The fiberoptic cable that makes Rocket Fiber possible runs literally underneath the streetcar line to Gilbert's newly renovated downtown properties, offering connection speeds around 100 times faster than standard lines (on par with Google Fiber).

The project is the culmination of Gilbert's decade-long land grab that accelerated in 2013 with the state's forced implementation of Emergency Management. That system imbued a single person with the power to decide, with impunity, when and how to sell off assets, fire elected officials, and rearrange finances to pay bondholders. Between Gilbert's real estate and technology investments, he is setting up Detroit for a San Francisco-style gentrification storm.

[Sources: Motor City Muckraker, Detroit News, Progress Michigan Study, Detroit Free Press, DBusiness.]

Dan Gilbert's empire includes a slew of businesses at the intersections of finance, private equity, urbanism, entertainment, sports, and gambling, many of them under the Rock Ventures umbrella. After squeezing a \$50 million tax break out of Detroiters, Gilbert opportunistically relocated Quicken Loans headquarters from the wealthy sprawl/suburb of Novi to downtown Detroit in 2007. However, his downtown buying spree began in earnest when the city was desperate after the 2008 real estate crisis. In 2008, he acquired One Woodward, a 29-story skyscraper situated at the head of Woodward Avenue, for \$8.4 million—a steal, given that the same building sold for \$20 million a decade before. Gilbert and his companies went on to buy more than 95 properties on or near the QLINE, in many instances paying \$10 or less for vacant city-owned land and buildings he promised to develop later. Perhaps his most ostentatious of these purchases was the Z, a parking structure that he bought for \$1 and adorned with murals from 27 international street and graffiti artists.

With his properties as the center, Gilbert announced his plan to develop retail stores, apartments, and offices along Woodward—an effort he branded "Opportunity Detroit." He made the announcement on the same day that a lame duck legislature passed Public Act 436, a referendum-proof Emergency Management law. Public Act 436 overturned a successful state-wide ballot initiative rejecting the previously enacted emergency manager law, Public Act 4. Before the legislature acted, Gilbert endorsed emergency management at a press conference for the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation and his venture capital fund Rock Ventures in March 2013. He said, "As hard as it is to

suspend democracy for a short period of time, I think it's in the best interest of everyone." With government out of the way, Gilbert worked directly with bankruptcy lawyers and others to purchase and renovate buildings along Woodward, from I-75 to the water.

[Sources: PR Newswire, MLive, Crains Detroit, Detroit News]

The 21.5-mile-long Woodward Avenue (Michigan Highway 1) has long been the symbolic aorta of Detroit industry—legendary as the former site of Highland Park Ford plant, Hudson's Department Store, and the 1967 rebellion. Today, the route carries Dan Gilbert's redevelopment scheme, both by "modeling" the city's potential in the hope of attracting young (tech) entrepreneurs and by providing Gilbert with the means to cash in. But a deeper look into Woodward's history reveals not only the city's settler colonial origins and its history of labor exploitation, but also a pattern of investment and disinvestment that benefits land speculators. Gilbert is only the latest beneficiary of this cycle. Once known as the Saginaw Trail, Woodward exists on top of a Native American trade route, one of many throughout the nation making the U.S. trade and expansion possible that pioneers, statesmen, and militia depended on for survival. Well-known as the first paved highway in the United States, Woodward was constructed from about 1914 to the mid-century using prison labor, repeatedly forcing the removal of residents and businesses. Further development along the highway in the mid-1920s contributed to the mass exit of industry into the suburbs that took place in the 1960s. M-1 not only connected cities and neighborhoods from Detroit to Pontiac, but routed infrastructure investments away from the city, providing the American model for suburbanization.

As Detroit put the country on wheels, it gave white people the option of leaving "dangerous" urban areas. With his properties secured in downtown Detroit, Gilbert has driven the current period of investment with a distinct anti-black narrative. Macroeconomic trends that led to Detroit's decline are blamed on black management. Nearly 50 years of black leadership are blamed for industrial (white) flight. In this story, Detroit is now an "opportunity" for young hip pioneers to settle the "empty" lands created in part by Quicken Loan's aggressive subprime mortgages.

[Sources: Detroit Free Press (Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library), Indigenous People's History of the United States, by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz]

The QLINE is the first private-sector public transportation initiative in the U.S. to hijack

a federal grant originally issued for a city-wide rapid transit system, in this case for \$25 million. Out of a total cost of \$238.6 million, \$105.2 came from foundations, private corporations, and hospitals. Gilbert contributed \$10 million, more than any other single donor—with half of it going to the naming rights, transforming the M-1 Rail into the "QLINE." With \$140 million going to the purchase of the streetcars and the laying of the tracks, the remaining \$98.6 million will update infrastructure and pad operations for the next decade, because the QLINE will need to be the second most popular streetcar in the country to pay for its own operating costs.

Even with this investment, Gilbert's toy train will not be enough to fill his buildings and inflate his property values. Enter the tech sector: While the street was torn open for the M-1 rail construction, an idea for a new company took root. Seeded by some of Gilbert's employees and fertilized with a \$31 million Rock Venture investment, the scheme involved fiber optic cables installed below the QLINE, forming the "spine" of Rocket Fiber's in-ground infrastructure, connecting Wayne State/Midtown to Campus Martius, what we've come to know as Gilbertville. Rocket Fiber saved millions of dollars on the deal, avoiding the costly process of tearing up streets or running fiber on telephone poles. So far the company has laid over 30 miles of fiber throughout many of the newly renovated Gilbert buildings along Woodward. Public Relations from the Gilbert team report Rocket Fiber won a "competitive bidding" process to provide free wifi service to the QLINE and at the 14 train stops along Woodward. It must be hard to compete with the internet provider that fed its wires underneath the track. Three miles of free public wifi is hardly an equal exchange for the millions of dollars Rocket Fiber saved with the QLINE installation—all for an internet service that exceeds the needs of the average internet user. In other words, Gilbert's service is a pitch to the tech industry and related industries, such as finance. He wants them to pay rent and buy into the new network at his downtown properties.

[Sources: RocketFiber.com, CrainsDetroit.com, OpportunityDetroit.com, transportation.gov]

The QLINE maps Gilbert's takeover of Detroit. It represents the latest upturn in the investment/disinvestment cycle on Woodward Avenue, continuing a process that began with depictions of the city as an "urban wilderness." "Ruin porn" and stories of resurgent nature made the city visible to tourists seeking tales

of adventure, disaster, failed industry, and resilient people. Adventurous young entrepreneurs and artists, hearing these tales, moved to the city to build their businesses and make their work on *terra nullius*, land represented as empty. Like nineteenth century pioneers on the Western frontier, these urban settlers made the land more attractive to investors and helped to increase property values. Their run-ins with squatters justified a regime of law-and-order.

Traversing less than a sixth of Woodward and disconnected from the larger metro system, the QLine is not a solution to the city's transportation problems. It is a narrative device, designed to demonstrate the city's capacity for change at the same time that it detours the racializing and racist processes and policies that have sustained a century of investment/disinvestment in Detroit, from redlining and neighborhood covenants to water shutoffs, tax foreclosures, and opt-out clauses on cross-county transportation routes. Even negative coverage of the QLine project brings it and the city into view, while suggesting that city administration and its corporate sponsors have the ability to get things done in the face of opposition. In short, the QLine increased Detroit's visibility to Gilbert's primary audience—tech entrepreneurs.

[Sources: Detroit Free Press (Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library), "Your Wilderness: The White Possession of Detroit in Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive*" by Matthew Irwin (Capitalism, Nature, Socialism, Dec. 2, 2016), *Out of Nowhere: Disaster and Tourism in the White Mountains* by Eric Purchase]

In a city where 40 percent of the population doesn't have internet access, Rocket Fiber, much like the QLINE, isn't meant for Detroiters. It's intended to fill Dan Gilbert's properties with tech workers, self-styled urban pioneers eager to gentrify/settle the city. It's no secret that Gilbert imagines Detroit as another, if not the "next," Silicon Valley. His \$1.6 billion investment in Detroit real estate included a portion for tech business incubators.

Around the time Gilbert's land grab in Detroit began, he also started the nonprofit Bizdom to provide office space, training, and up to \$125,000 in startup funding for young tech entrepreneurs. In 2011, he purchased the Madison Theatre building on Broadway to open a tech hub he christened M@dison. In 2012, Rock Ventures rolled out "IT in the D," a program to give local university students real-world tech experience and the "Valley to Detroit" campaign to recruit laid-off Silicon Valley techies. These programs took off at the very same moment that the state implemented Emergency Management.

In 2014, Gilbert made his pitch at the *TechCrunch: Disrupt San Francisco* annual conference: come to Detroit, there is opportunity for innovation and cheap real estate. The plan seems to be working. Among the more than 60 tech start-ups that claim Detroit as their home are Cribspot, which maps off-campus rentals for college students; Remake Detroit, which tells stories about products made in Detroit and the people who make them; and, not surprisingly, Kidpreneur, which teaches entrepreneurship and technology to kids. Adding corporate credibility to Gilbert's vision, in late 2015, Amazon opened a corporate office in Detroit, and, at the beginning of the 2017, Microsoft announced the relocation of its Southfield office to downtown Detroit.

[Sources: Detroit Free Press, GrowDetroit.com, WXYZ.com.]

To understand what all this tech development means to Detroiters, just have a look at San Francisco's Mission District, where politically themed murals beautify the streets of a neighborhood that the average artist can't afford. Tech industry gentrification is relentless and total, often literally hidden behind public art projects that make the city more appealing to white people, like Shepard Fairey's mural/brand on Gilbert's One Campus Martius property.

More importantly, "creative city" initiatives help to deflect criticism from gentrification by recasting arts and technology as new American industries, lifting up the city. Indeed, the Detroit Institute of Arts, which sits on the QLINE route, attempts to historicize and naturalize this transfer to the new economies by claiming on its website that Diego Rivera's industry murals depict industry and technology as the "indigenous culture" of Detroit. This is, of course, another deferment of the real conversation: real estate is the industry of the U.S. and has been from the nation's very earliest conception of itself as an inheritor—rather than a beneficiary and legislator—of settler colonial conditions. The architects of Detroit's bankruptcy, like Dan Gilbert, have perpetuated these conditions through disinvestment and depopulation, portraying their speculations on land as acts of benevolent redevelopment. Debt in Detroit has been used to rationalize land, water, and privatization for the benefit of the white and wealthy.

[Sources: DIA.org, New York Times]

Despite the hegemonic force of Emergency Management and its related technologies of exploitation and dispossession, Detroiters have not been silent. Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management organized fire-

fighters, welfare rights advocates, activists, and community organizations to lead protests such as the Motown Slowdowns and other civil disobedience actions. In the face of land grabs and subsidies for corporate development, Detroiters have been advocating for community benefits and more local participation with projects such as the Community Benefits Agreement. The North End Woodward Community Coalition also galvanized residents and faith communities around transportation justice, specifically concerned with QLine's effect on the North End community.

When Allied Media Projects learned of Gilbert's plans for the Rocket Fiber install along Woodward Ave, they pushed for free public Wi-Fi in the Cass Corridor as an exchange for Detroit's investment in Gilbert's project. Since 2009, AMP's Detroit Digital Justice coalition has been working on creating more and more equitable access to internet services, and, in 2010, AMP launched the Digital Stewards Program to train citizens in organizing and hardware installation to create mesh wireless networks for marginalized neighborhoods. Through that program, AMP fomented the deal with Rocket Fiber, squeezing out one gig per second wireless signals to neighborhood hubs located at Grace in Action in Southwest Detroit, WNUC community radio station in the North End, and Church of the Messiah in the Islandview Village neighborhood. Rocket Fiber sells the service to the programs at wholesale and a cadre of nonprofits and business development organizations currently pick up the bill. Over the long term, each neighborhood community will be responsible for managing and paying for their own networks, and the question is how they can do it without duplicating the systems of dispossession and dislocation the program is meant to combat.

Antonio Rafael is a Xicano Boricua organizer, farmer, artist and entrepreneur from #SWDetroit. He co-founded #RaizUp collective hip-hop for decolonial education and supporting movement. More than just resisting the abuse of land, water and people, Antonio started #SWGrows urban farm and ecological design cooperative to expand art, agriculture and green development in his neighborhood.

Matthew Irwin is a PhD student in American studies at the University of New Mexico. Also a widely published art critic, he is a two-time NEA arts journalism fellow and a two-time finalist for the Warhol Foundation/Creative Capital Arts Writers Grant. Matthew's dissertation, in progress, looks at discourses on citizenship and belonging along Woodward Ave.



Photos provided by Free Market of Detroit (left), Ifoma (center), Free Market of Detroit (right)

Towards a New Economy

No Money, No Waste, Everything We Need

BY HALIMA CASELLS

"We believe and wish to practice uplifting our community wealth and creativity; putting less into the waste-stream; reclaiming practices of meeting our needs without money; and empowering ourselves by re-evaluating what is valuable."

—Free Market of Detroit

My father owned one pair of gym shoes for as long as I can remember. Literally ONE pair. He had a few pairs of shoes for the office, and a couple for dress, and that was it. He wore this pair of 1978 Nikes everywhere on the week-

ends; out to the garden in the backyard, to the grocery store, to the wood shop in our garage. And I was extremely embarrassed as a preteen, when he wore them to take me anywhere. "They fit, and they do their job," he would say "no need for another pair." One day I noticed the sole began to peel, and there was a small hole. I excitedly showed him thinking he and I would go shopping for a new pair. I was wrong; I was dismayed when he went to the shoe shop in the Eastern Market and had the sole repaired. They were not for fashion, or for others to like. They were valued for their usefulness. This lesson (although super-hard to swallow at the time) became extremely important and central to my life as I got older.

Fast forward a decade or two . . . to the birth of my second daughter. She and my eldest are

nearly eight years apart. I had no baby stuff just laying around when she popped on the scene. And I definitely did not want to buy a bunch of stuff that would no longer be useful after 6 months or a year. So I decided to host a backyard barbeque with a swap table. The bottom of the invite read, "Please bring any gently-used outgrown children's clothing or toys, we will have a swap table at this event." We were a small group of family and friends, and somehow we amassed a giant mountain of stuff . . . some stuff I was SUPER grateful to have, some stuff other people were happy to walk home with, and some that was eventually donated to COTS.

This was so successful that a group of friends began hosting these events around Detroit and the Free Market of Detroit was born. For five years it has continued to expand, adding several

different elements: DJ's and a dance floor, a photo booth, open mic and live performances, artists who sew and help facilitate fashion up-cycling workshops, as well as other unique experiences for participants to enjoy. In the past year the Free Market hosted 10 swaps in schools, community centers, churches, at festivals, urban gardens, and conferences. Much of the success is in the interaction between people. "It made me so happy to see someone wearing a shirt I helped her design and sew at the swap over a year ago, I cannot even tell you," Diana N., a Detroit-based multi-talented artist, told me a few weeks ago. Sharing the stories behind the object, knowing you gave or received a gift from someone you know, and co-creating useful items together are all ways that we enjoy building community.

The admission to every swap is one item. Everyone is entered into the circle of giving this way. And if folks show up without anything, we ask them to make a pledge to pay it forward or host their own swap with family and friends the next time they have a get-together. Why? We want to inspire people to re-evaluate their stuff, and think about how we can share and better

put it to use. Once I told a woman that to get a pair of snake-skinned heels she wanted she would have to leave an item. "Anything?" she asked. "Yeh, anything that you are ready to let go of," I said. She lived around the corner, and asked me to hold the shoes, she would be right back. She returned with the most wonderful bags of clothes and books and toys, and a look of relief on her face. "I have been wanting all this stuff out of my house for so long, thank you," she said as she walked away with the heels under her arm.

So how did we get here? Our great-great-grandparents did not have closets full of clothes; and garages full of gadgets, and attics and basements and storage lockers full of stuff, and yet many lived fulfilled lives. Where does our desire for more and more stuff come from? The website storyofstuff.org offers a lot of interesting insight.

And what we are doing really isn't new. In fact, its ancient. Societies all around the world practiced gift economies, and placed value based on what the needs were at the time, and the relationships between people. Even on this land, before it was colonized, First Nations peoples had protocols for sharing and trading with each

other and meeting needs without the use of money as we know it today.

We will be exploring stories of swappers and the narratives that drive our society through photography and art in a forthcoming book, *Fashioning the Free Market*, due out in September of 2018. Check out our website www.freemarketofdetroit.com to stay informed of the release as well as upcoming swaps. And please let us know if you'd like to host your own. We would love to promote yours!

Native-Detroit artist/community advocate Halima Cassells exhibits widely, and creates work that is exploratory—designing interactive installations, and spaces for collaborative artistic expression, including projects that engender new/ancient economy practices. She occupies a myriad of roles that are unified by a deep devotion to fostering community inter-connectivity. She works as an independent artist and assumes roles at Oakland Avenue Artists Coalition, O.N.E. Mile project, Incite Focus Fab Lab, Center for Community Based Enterprise, and the Free Market of Detroit.



Free Market of Detroit fashion shoot featuring swapped apparel and accessories, photo by Bree Gant



The Noble Outdoor Classroom: Native Species Transform the Community

BY LINDA GADSDEN

Photos by
Piper Carter

I.

All too often in the City of Detroit, we look around our neighborhood and see vacant abandoned houses.

Too often in the City of Detroit, we look around our neighborhood and see vacant overgrown lots.

How often do we see the problems and ignore the beauty? How often do we see loss and fail to see value?

This is a story about looking for solutions and seeking an answer to problems. It has always been said that it takes a whole community to raise a child.

It must now be realized that it takes a whole community to save a neighborhood and main-

tain a sense of family. If we look closely at our neighborhoods, we will be able to see that there was a time in the past when each family in the neighborhood was connected and they made up different parts of an extended family.

Adults interacted together and were friends. Children attended school together and played together and developed lifelong friendships.

Over the years people moved out of the neighborhoods in Detroit. Fires destroyed houses and they sat empty. People began to use vacant lots as dumping grounds and those of us remaining in the neighborhoods sat back and watched the decline.

How long can we look and pretend that we do not see? It is easy to sit back and think that trash

removal is somebody else's job. But when we get tired of looking at it . . . it becomes our job.

II.

In the summer of 2015 the Wyoming-Kentucky-Indiana-Wisconsin-Ohio Block Club (in the Grand River area) was created with the mission of creating a clean safe environment for all members of the neighborhood. At that time seniors were isolated in their homes and abandoned houses placed children at risk during their walks to school.

Concern for the neighborhood provided the need to create the block club to address the illegal dumping and the trash building up along the streets. Next came the opportunity to



Photos by Piper Carter

address the overgrown lots and the overgrown trees that created unsafe passage.

Cleaning up the neighborhood provided the opportunity to see the beauty of years past and have a close-up look at the beauty that was fading. Cleaning up the yards of abandoned houses provided the chance to see the love and attention that was put in gardens of the past. When one is removing trash from the yard of an abandoned house, there is beauty to be found among the weeds that are choking out plants and flowers.

Seniors in the neighborhood became curious about the activity and took the opportunity to have conversations and share memories of the Block Clubs in the past and the interaction of neighbors. Young adults in the neighborhood were willing to be helpful with clean-up tasks and heavy lifting. Children found the activities interesting and looked for ways to be helpful. That led to being allowed to meet weekly with children at our neighboring Noble Elementary-Middle School, to provide recreational activities and ways to expand civic engagement.

Familyhood Inc. was created in the Spring of 2016 with the mission of engaging youth in positive activities and teaching entrepreneurial skills.

I grew up during a time when cooking and sewing were taught in school; classes in wood-working and other hands-on activities gave children skills to express their creativity; Girl Scouts and 4-H Clubs expanded these opportunities.

Today, those classes are missing. Many libraries are closed in the City of Detroit. Craft stores

do not exist in the City of Detroit for young people to identify interests and develop hobbies. 'Familyhood' has the vision to fill that void for young people and provide the opportunity for parents to develop skills and interests alongside their children and include neighborhood Seniors in the growth process. Children should not be taught in a vacuum. Families benefit most when children and parents grow together.

When we go into the streets removing trash we get to hear conversations. We get to realize that there are young mothers struggling for a place to call home. There are young men squatting in houses without the skills to create a better tomorrow. We get to hear children talk about what they don't have but want.

Many creative jobs and earning opportunities grow out of skills and recreational interests. From baking to cooking to crafts to gardening to wood-working.

And along came the Great Opportunity! The opportunity to submit a grant to Detroit Future City with the vision of the Noble Outdoor Classroom! The opportunity to create an environment where all segments of the community could come together on a project—a project that will grow and benefit the neighborhood for years into the future.

III.

The Noble Outdoor Classroom is located at 12408 Wisconsin at Fullerton across from the Noble Elementary-Middle School. It is a Four Season Garden placed on a vacant lot that has four plots that are 20 feet in diameter and planted to reflect seasonal interest for Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer.

The Spring Garden is at the front of the lot and has a Tulip Magnolia Tree as the focal point. The tree is surrounded by approximately 250 bulbs that will bloom in the Spring. The bulbs are an assortment of Tulips, Daffodils, Hyacinths, Blue Flag Iris and Crocus. The plot is anchored with Black Eyed Susan and Iris plants rescued from an abandoned house on Indiana.

To keep the plot from being bare of plants after Spring blooms fade, the plot is sprinkled with Lily of the Valley that were rescued from the yard of an abandoned house on Ohio.

The plot will be encircled with Hosta plants that are being donated by a neighbor on Wisconsin and Star of Bethlehem bulbs that were salvaged from the lot during digging.

The Summer Garden is the second plot and has a Dogwood Tree as the focal point. The tree is surrounded in the plot by three rescued rose bushes. One rose bush, whose color is unknown, was rescued from an abandoned yard on Indiana. The second rose bush, with tiny white blooms, was rescued from the yard of a house with fire damage on Wisconsin. The third rose bush, which has pink blooms, was rescued from the yard of an abandoned house (location unremembered) a couple of years ago. The interesting thing about this rose bush is its tendency to travel in a garden bed by underground roots.

The Summer Garden has an assortment of Summer blooming perennials that include: Bee Balm, Blazing Star, Milkweed, Phlox, Ornamental Onion and Ornamental Garlic. Ground cover includes mint, thyme, and oregano.

The Summer Garden also contains rescued Iris, a Peony plant and will be surrounded with rescued Hosta.

The benefit of the Seniors in the garden planting process was most clearly displayed during the difficulty of locating Milkweed and Onion plants. Unknown to this writer (who was feeling totally frustrated by the inability to locate Milkweed and Onion plants in any market) the Seniors was able to point out the abundance of

both plants in abandoned lots and along sidewalks of abandoned houses. Who knew! Wow!

Now, I see them everywhere.

Bee Balm is also widely growing in alleys! The young people will now research Heirloom plants with the help of our Seniors!

The Winter Garden is located next on the lot. It is coming after the Summer Garden because a Colorado Blue Spruce is the focal point of the Winter Garden. The children will make Christmas ornaments for the tree and it's location is best on the lot.

The Spruce is surrounded by Holly and accented with Red Twig Dogwoods.

Additional plantings include Viburnum and assorted summer blooming perennials.

Two rescued rose bushes include a match to the white rose bush and a red rose bush rescued from the fire damaged house on Wisconsin.

The plot is sprinkled with Periwinkle ground cover rescued from an abandoned house on Indiana and will be encircled with rescued Hosta plants.

The Fall Garden is located at the back of the lot under an overhang of trees. The focal point of the Fall Garden is a Smoke Bush. The path to the Smoke Bush is lined with Ornamental Cabbage. The Fall Garden is circled on the left side by Ornamental Grass and lined at the back with Fern rescued from an abandoned house on Indiana.

Additional plantings include Butterfly Weed, Bee Balm and assorted perennials. Additional plants include rescued Lilies from an abandoned yard on Ohio that have Orange Blooms, a sprinkle of the Orange Lilies that grow like weeds in the City of Detroit and a Rose Bush that blooms orange.

Additionally, the Fall Garden contains the ground cover Periwinkle rescued from an abandoned house on Indiana.

The Fall Garden will be encircled with the Star of Bethlehem bulbs that were salvaged during the digging of the lot and Hosta rescued from an abandoned yard on Wisconsin.

The tree area to the left of the Fall Garden was left in a woodland state. It contains an unidentified Rose bush and assorted perennials that include Bee Balm, Milkweed, Star of Bethlehem and Money Plants. A Rose of Sharon rescued from the alley between Kentucky and Indiana; and an Iris rescued from an abandoned house on Indiana was added for color.

Native plants and rescued plants play a big role in maintaining the history of the neighborhood. Rescued plants provide the opportunity for Seniors to see the plants of their past friends and neighbors continue to grow and provide beauty. Rescued plants allow the younger generation to view the the time and pride that was invested in homes and yards of the past. This awareness of the past allows the three generations to blend for past - present - future.

IV.

The creation of the Outdoor Classroom Garden has expanded the neighborhood involvement to all age groups from children to Seniors. And the activities will not end with the planting. In addition to tasks to maintain the Garden, Seasonal activities will be scheduled to enjoy the beauty of the Garden and enjoy social interaction.

The Garden provides the opportunity for Seniors who have sat in their homes in the past to venture out and share their knowledge and memories. They can bring their knowledge of the Block Clubs of the past to the benefit of the Block Club of the present.

Seniors are a fountain of knowledge in locating native plants and their beneficial use. Residents in the garden vicinity appreciated the improvements to the vacant lot and began to display

increased personal yard beautification. Children and youth began an early involvement in civic engagement and community improvement.

Young Adults became involved in the labor of lot preparation for planting and expressed interest in vegetable gardening for future projects. Young parents embraced the Outdoor Garden as a positive recreation location for their children and as an enjoyable place for social activities. Children enjoyed the opportunity to freely play in dirt and do light tasks.

The overall inclusiveness of all age groups of the neighborhood in the creation of the Outdoor Classroom Four Season Garden has provided the opportunity to re-create a time when neighbors interacted with each other as a unit. Returned is the time of open involvement and a decrease of generational fear. When neighbors are involved with each other and push towards common goals, neighborhoods become safer places to live.

The Outdoor Classroom does not end with the planting of the Four Season Garden. Additional plans include the creation of seating areas under, between and around the established trees that provide shade; the creation of walking paths; and the construction of a blackboard and benches to create a classroom effect.

Additional plans include the use of Rain Barrels with the building of a rain roof and the use of compost bins. There is also the desire for a Worm Farm. All which provide additional learning experiences.

A Garden is a gift that just keeps on giving!

Linda Gadston is a retired Direct Service Provider spending over 20 years in the field of Substance Abuse with SHAR (Self Help Addiction Rehabilitation) House, 5 years with the Department of Family and Children's Service in Family Re-unification, and 5 years as a Crisis Intervention Specialist working with families. She is the mother of Leslye and Martesha, the grandmother of ShaTonya, Christopher, Nichole and Cornell, and the great-grandmother of Christian. Her hobbies include: Reading, Crochet, Baking, Sewing, Gardening and collecting Puzzles and Shopkins.

SACRED SITES DETROIT

The Spring Garden

The Spring Garden is at the front of the lot and has a Tulip Magnolia Tree as the focal point. The plot is anchored with Black Eyed Susan and Iris plants rescued from an abandoned house on Indiana. To keep the plot from being bare of plants after Spring blooms fade, the plot is sprinkled with Lily of the Valley that were rescued from the yard of an abandoned house on Ohio. The plot will be encircled with Hosta plants that are being donated by a neighbor on Wisconsin and Star of Bethlehem bulbs that were salvaged from the lot during diggings.

The Summer Garden

The Summer Garden is the second plot and has a Dogwood Tree as the focal point. The tree is surrounded in the plot by three rescued rose bushes. One rose bush, whose color is unknown, was rescued from an abandoned yard on Indiana. The Summer Garden also contains rescued Iris, a Peony plant and will be surrounded with rescued Hosta.

The Winter Garden

The Spruce in the Winter Garden is surrounded by Holly and accented with Red Twig Dogwoods. A Colorado Blue Spruce is the focal point of the Winter Garden. The Spruce is surrounded by Holly and accented with Red Twig Dogwoods. The children will make the Christmas ornaments for the tree and its location is best on the lot.

The Fall Garden

The Fall Garden will be encircled with the Star of Bethlehem bulbs that were salvaged during the digging of the lot and Hosta rescued from an abandoned yard on Wisconsin. A Rose of Sharon rescued from the alley between Kentucky and Indiana; and an Iris rescued from an abandoned house on Indiana was added for color.



Sowing the Seeds of Self-Determination

BY NAIM EDWARDS

Photo by Diane Weiss

Historically, when people gained power and made demands, they were invited to the proverbial table. In the U.S., this table and its chairs were made of wood stolen from indigenous people and constructed by African slaves. The powers that be sit propped up on centuries of stolen wealth, injustice, and compromise. They inquire, “What will it take to get you rebels to settle down and stop challenging us?” Many revolutionary leaders came to that table and accepted concessions in the form of laws and remunerations. Those who refused to take a seat and continued fighting faced harassment, exclusion, imprisonment, torture, and death.

I am grateful for those who, throughout history, have fought to have a place at the proverbial table so that people like me might have a better life. However, I am cognizant of the reality that the

dominant culture is still lacking a moral compass and commitment to justice for all. The table has served as a place for maintaining power, rather than redistributing or sharing it. Moreover, there have been constant efforts to burn the seats our ancestors fought so hard to make for us. Unions, Medicare, public education, affirmative action, and even the right to vote are all under threat of being revoked. Indeed, it is important to continue to fight for a space at the table, but many of us are committed to investing more energy into constructing our own tables. The powers that be may keep theirs as it crumbles under its unsustainable weight.

Building our own tables means we must develop and implement our own safety nets to sustain us. The 40 acres and a mule never came. Reparations never came. Universal healthcare and education never came. Yet, some of our elders knew all the while, as we know, that we can prepare and take better care of ourselves than the system can. We can educate our children, build our own homes and hospitals, make our own music, and protect our communities.

Detroit is a city that has experienced firsthand how government and the private sector have failed to serve and protect communities. Across America, we bear witness to the deterioration of our country’s social fabric in tandem with the destruction of our environment. As more and more are left to fend for themselves, we recognize and proclaim what we know to be true: that we are enough. We can support one another, and challenge narratives that reinforce

our dependency on government and jobs for our livelihoods.

I am a part of the movement to *get ready, and stay ready*—fostering a culture of diverse people committed to learning, sharing, and practicing how to be prepared for emergencies and situations where we cannot depend on *the system*. With community, the right knowledge and skills, individuals and families (particularly people with low or no income) can alleviate many of their needs on their own. Some are learning how to store and filter rain water, build and repair their cars or homes, while others are mastering the art of growing, foraging, and using plants and mushrooms found all around us for food and medicine. What unites us is our understanding that we cannot and must not depend on the almighty dollar and institutions we do not control for our well-being, security, and our liberation.

As our revolution grows in numbers, we center ourselves on the idea of resiliency. The ecological definition of resilience is the ability to survive and thrive in periods of stress and scarcity. Stress, of course, comes in many forms: physical, mental, emotional, economic, social. Scarcity includes both physical materials and social and spiritual connections. We lift up the values of knowledge, skills and, most importantly, relationships—human resources in the form of people you trust and can depend on.

In keeping with many of the efforts that have been happening in Detroit for decades, Voices for Earth Justice (VEJ) has sought to foster deeper relationships with one another and nature. In 2014, I joined the organization with a bias toward urban gardening and biodiversity conservation. The organization has been developing a property in Brightmoor called Hope House with the intention of utilizing the space to carry out our mission: to deepen our connections to one another and sense of wonder for creation through prayer, education, and action.

Gardening is the consummate mechanism for fulfilling our mission. The act of gardening and all of its secondary benefits can promote communication, connecting with the earth, nurturing life and death, physical activity, and learning about nature. Being in the garden can put you in a place of meditation, peace, and curiosity. It’s an opportunity to learn and interact with new plants and other life we share the planet with. We also draw from indigenous knowledge, permaculture principles, and encourage simply being observant to all of the activity in addition to the labor. Everything humans have learned has stemmed from

connecting with things in nature, whether antibiotics, pottery, metalworking, or circuits.

At Hope House, we do agroecological land management. That means we blend vegetable production with environmental, scientific, and social consciousness. The property features rain gardens, a small native prairie, and an edible plant garden. All three spaces are managed in ways that promote biodiversity and minimize the need for high inputs like tractor tilling, spraying chemicals or even replanting every year. We let nature do most of the work and try to design the property in a way that only requires some weeding, minimal mowing, and some irrigation during dry periods.

We grow plants that are native to southeast Michigan that restore the biodiversity of birds and insects. These plants, as common as dande-

lion and milkweed, or as foreign as foxglove, beardtongue and turtle head, evolved here and are resilient in their ability to survive in the wettest, driest, coldest, or hottest times of the growing season. We also grow plants native to other places in order to increase the diversity like gboma or African eggplant and varieties of corn and black-eyed peas from Arizona, Puerto Rico, and Italy. Biological diversity is a key principle to ecological resiliency because more diverse systems can withstand a variety of stressors.

This summer, VEJ is piloting a resiliency program called *Roses in Concrete*. We are extending the resiliency through diversity theory into educating diverse skills. We’re providing one-week programs for youth and learnshops for adults, with each day focusing on themes that foster self-determination and



Photos by Diane Weiss

preparedness. Themes include: 1) Herbalism and Medicinal healing, 2) Appropriate hand tool and garden tool use, 3) Wild, edible plant identification, 4) Food preparation, 5) Emergency Preparedness, 6) Communication, Meditation, and Reflection. The course will be run out of our site called Hope House in Brightmoor (northwest Detroit).

The course is the product of a series of meetings and conversations about how to build resilient communities in Detroit. One of the motifs of these meetings is, resiliency begins with trust. Safety and security is not derived from hoarding resources in confines and isolating yourself; rather our ability to maintain peace is inextricably linked to the well-being of our neighbors. We must concern ourselves with our relationships and the health of others.

It's the age-old "give a man a fish" versus "teach a man to fish" proverb. As we strive to *get ready*,



Pictured: Elsa Borello, L'Oreal Hawkes, and Naim Edwards, photo by Diane Weiss

and stay ready, a huge component of that is preparing all of those around us. Knowing how to grow and store food is just as integral as knowing how to share food. Through sharing, we build relationships, and sharing knowledge multiplies communities' ability to be resilient. Many hands make light work; many minds make a revolution!

We aren't waiting around for hand-outs. We are strengthening our relationships and interdependence with one another. We are healing our communities and ourselves. Bringing forth justice for all will require us to continue to challenge and hold institutions accountable, but it is equally wise and necessary to establish our own systems of support. This entails redefining how we interact with one another and nature. As we continue to build new tables made with indigenous knowledge, trust, and love, we will share the fruits of freedom, healing, and resilience.

Naim hails from Harrisburg, PA and has spent time in many different environments over his 30 year life: inner city schools, white suburbs, Morehouse College, pueblos of Ecuador, University of Michigan, and now Detroit. The experiences from these places have shaped him into an evolving person committed justice, music, and reconnecting people to nature and the spiritual. He is the Environmental Specialist for the city of Detroit. Naim Leal (fb), @DetroitBioNerd (twitter)



Pictured: L'Oreal Hawkes, Ahmed Malone, and Elsa Borello, photo by Diane Weiss



All the Neighborhood's a Stage

The Power of Storytelling: Riverwise Interview with 'Pedal To Porch's' Cornetta Lane

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY ERIC THOMAS CAMPBELL

Neighborhood by neighborhood, Cornetta Lane is coaxing Detroit homeowners onto their porches to take ownership of their communities through the ancient craft of storytelling. The stage may be intimate, but the potential for raising awareness about our identity, and our vital role in protecting it, is vast.

In 2014, Lane turned to storytelling as a way to reclaim her own childhood neighborhood, known as Core City, after discovering signs of a misguided effort to rebrand the area as West Corktown.

Lane reacted by canvassing the city blocks where she grew up. She quickly discovered a high level of awareness and a willingness to organize around the issue. Folks in other parts of the city may not have known the area inside the approximate borders of Michigan Avenue, Grand River, Warren and East Grand Blvd. as 'Core City', but the residents living there certainly did.

Out of that initial neighborhood survey, Core City Stories, which has now evolved into Pedal To

Porch, was born. Pedal To Porch hosts bike tours through designated neighborhoods, making stops at designated homes where residents emerge onto their porches to tell their story. Lane and her longtime neighbors took the rebranding effort and used it as an opportunity to engage a wider audience in a much-needed conversation about the past, present and future of our city.

The intentional renaming of historic Black neighborhoods is a device used by city planners to make communities more attractive to potential investors, and to speed the erasure of the people's cultural history. Pedal To Porch and Lane's writing on that issue, and the subject of gentrification in general, have increased the scope of the dialogue.

"For me, rebranding is a form of gentrification and it's a hot topic," Lane told *Riverwise*. "No one wants to be labeled as a gentrifier."

With the help of a Knight Foundation grant, Pedal To Porch has taken the concept citywide. *Riverwise* met with Lane on her new porch to discuss the evolution of Pedal to Porch and its potential to increase self-determination from within our strongest asset—the neighborhood community. —ETC

Photo by Diane Weiss

RIVERWISE: After the success of *Core City Stories* in 2015, how important was it to continue developing the outreach element with *Pedal To Porch*?

CORNETTA LANE: I wanted to create a city-wide conversation about what rebranding can do to neighborhoods. If you look at New York, neighborhoods were rebranded or buildings were rebranded, and then you get this wave of interest coming through those parts of New York and now people are priced out of their homes. I didn't want that to happen to Core City.



Photo by Erik Howard

When I launched *Core City Stories*, I needed to get my neighbors involved because I needed to share with them what was going on. I feel like the only way to do that was to go to their door and knock and have a conversation with them.

And then also realizing, there is a digital divide in Detroit. Not everyone has access to the internet. The way that I found out about the effort to establish a 'West Corktown' was scrolling through Facebook and stumbling upon the Model D article.

For *Pedal To Porch* I kept the same process that I had with *Core City [Stories]* because it establishes a trust and a relationship with the people I'm working with. Also, with *Pedal To Porch*, we're usually invited to the neighborhood so we don't presume that *Pedal To Porch* is for every community.

Pedal To Porch seeks to address the issue of neighbors not knowing each other, and neighbors not having conversations about what's happening in the community. It's built to lower the barrier of connection between neighbors so that we can begin to talk to each other.

I built in the door-to-door campaign, not only to begin to ask questions of the residents, but also to let them know that this thing is happening in their community and if they want to participate, they're more than welcome.

So it's a two-pronged reason for continuing with the door-to-door campaign: The first is to create awareness, the second is to ask questions of the residents. Not every community development organization is going to go door-to-door, so this can create another opportunity to do so."

RW: How has storytelling invigorated and mobilized the neighborhoods that have participated in *Pedal To Porch* thus far? Can you expand on the idea that storytelling can heighten one's consciousness, or self-consciousness—that in the act of telling your own story you're placing yourself in the course of history, or at least the history of your neighborhood?

CL: The community organizations that are contacting *Pedal To Porch* have usually

already established some sort of organizing process in the neighborhood and want to continue mobilizing residents through *Pedal To Porch*.

They are intimately aware of what's happening in their neighborhood and they just want to talk about either the history of it, or they just want to have an interesting and fun event.

The thing about *Pedal To Porch* is stories. I just believe in the power of crafting stories as well as telling stories. For me, crafting stories is all about self-reflection and I feel like when you put aside time to self-reflect, that's growing your emotional intelligence around your experiences and the more you do that the more capable you are of handling different situations and, also, whatever hurt that you've experienced during that time, be able to kind of heal from that.

Story crafting is a form of meditation, I feel. Because it has an ability to self-correct, or even change how you see and view things. It allows for emotional and intellectual exploration and I believe in that . . . when you come to tell your story you're able to share ideas with people

and share experiences and people are able to see themselves in your experience or begin to empathize better. I just think the two of them together, within a community, it's a very powerful tool for mobilizing and that's why it's resonating with a lot of people even outside of Detroit. They see the power that it can have in their neighborhood.

Pedal To Porch in Southwest Detroit, one of the storytellers told a story about how they started the Brown Beret chapter in Southwest Detroit. And another storyteller on a different street responded during the workshop that the Brown Berets had motivated him to become an activist.

They didn't know each other and now they do because someone paved the way for them to become active in Detroit and contribute to their community how they see fit . . . I thought that was a really powerful example of growing more in the connection to your community and your community's history.

RW: What types of stories have you been hearing during the tours? What topics seem to be the most popular?

CL: They range from a kid on the East Side, 16, who told a story about losing his dog and his neighbors helping him to find it, and that journey. Another woman talked about how her neighbor—an incredibly kind woman—pointed to a little sprig, or plant, that was in the ground and asked if we should let this thing grow? The other woman said, "Yeah, we should." And now it's like a 50-foot oak tree. One of the women has now passed on, but that tree lives in honor of her, along with the story.

Back in the southwest neighborhood, a man told us about social awareness and why he's now into urban farming. He talked about the extraction of Black wealth and poverty in his community. He was saying a lot of the homes around him burned down and now there are these huge gaps in his community and for every home that's gone, that story and history are gone as well. And so it's up to people in his community to reconnect or even fill in those gaps by creating new things that benefit the community, like gardens.

I think diversity of story is important. We can do issues-based stories, but I just prefer not to influence what people share. I want people to share what they authentically feel because it comes off better that way.

I have considered doing issues-based *Pedal To Porches*—issues like transportation, food and food insecurity but, for the most part, when we

host our storytelling workshops, we just ask people to talk about something significant that happened in their house or on their street and you get the diversity of stories.

RW: I love the idea of people using their own home as their stage. It not only makes the storyteller more comfortable, but provides a perfect prop for the stories themselves. How integral is the storytelling environment to the story?

CL: The interesting thing is that people don't necessarily have to leave their house. One woman—she's an artist—she brought all of her paintings out on the lawn. She had a little lemonade stand for everybody. She really kind of brought her house out so that people could feel comfortable on her front porch.

Public speaking is terrifying in general. But when you can speak on your front porch, I feel like that lessens the anxiety and you've gone through the storytelling workshop, so you know what you're going to say. You're comfortable in your delivery. So now you just have a built-in audience. There's something to be said about the comfort level within that.

RW: How many *Pedal To Porch* tours have you done? How many stories have been told through *Pedal To Porch* since its inception?

CL: For *Core City* it was four, for southwest six, and Eastside along Mack Avenue, five. This summer we're doing four tours in Detroit and each will have five storytellers and then we're doing one in Washington, D.C. with five storytellers.

RW: Have you seen any lasting effects on participants that went beyond the *Pedal To Porch* experience?

CL: The experience has influenced people to go to the next level in community engagement, or in making their community better. In *Core City*, after the bike ride, my neighbors began to be more active in the community. So we've launched the 48208 Collaborative. We meet once a month to just share what's happening in the neighborhood. That was pretty awesome.

I think that the best thing that can come from sharing your story is that now you're interested in organizing in your community because you're more connected to the people. Now you don't have that fear that you'll be doing it alone—you'll be doing it together, whatever it is.

On the Eastside, I really wanted to concentrate on conversations along the Detroit/Grosse Pointe border. After the *Pedal To Porch* on the Eastside, they put together a plan to create a

program where Detroiters and Grosse Pointers had to come together to create some kind of public art or public space along the border. They were finalists for the Knight Cities challenge, but they didn't ultimately win. I don't know if they are going to continue with that project, but further action was inspired by those stories.

RW: Are there any new projects or efforts on the horizon for yourself that have evolved out of *Pedal To Porch*?

CL: I'm starting a new initiative called *Dinner for 30*, and it's built to bridge cultural divides. I'm inviting a cook—it can be a novice or an expert—to recreate a dish that's connected to their fondest memory and they can invite their Dad or their Mom or their spouse or their best friend to help them prepare this dish. And at the end of their story, the audience will get to

CL: So when we won, we went to Philadelphia where the winners' convening was held. I was listening to some of these projects and I thought to myself, are some of these projects encouraging gentrification? Are some of these projects responsible for the alienation that some people feel?

I grapple with that question: Do foundations—that have no previous understanding of what communities are—do they effectively fund projects that will then, in the future, displace people, based on the participation of certain folks and not others?

I can say that, for the Knight Foundation, it has been hands-off. So I don't have to worry that my project exposed people or promoted gentrification. I didn't get push-back from the foundation for that, and I'm glad that I had that freedom.



Photo by Diane Weiss

taste the dish. We plan on doing five installations of *Dinner for 30*, and then we're going to create a Detroit Story recipe book. And it's all attached to this identity, food and culture and what food means for communities. So that's the project for the winter months.

RW: How are you dealing with the program's ties to the Knight Foundation and the perceived drawbacks to relying on foundation monies to ignite community engagement, or community development?

Contact Cornetta Lane and *Pedal To Porch* at www.pedaltoporch.strikingly.com



KIM REDIGAN



JIM PERKINSON



MARIANNE MCGUIRE

The Homrich 9: Standing for the People's Right to Water

KIM REDIGAN

"If anything is disorderly, it is an imposed system of governance that is disenfranchising citizens, uprooting the poor and working class, privatizing the commons, and denying babies and elders the human right to water. In comparison to those whose very existence in the face of brutal and unrelenting injustice is an ongoing act of resistance, our action was a mere crumb, a tiny ripple, an embarrassingly small gesture of solidarity—a way of trying to bring some decency and order to a disordered situation."

JIM PERKINSON

"Climate change is a message from the water-world calling us to account for our abuse of the poor and the planet for 5,000 years of imperial history. In action and accountability, I take my bearings and hope from people of color by fighting for water justice and an end to settler colonialism in this city of the strait."

MARIANNE MCGUIRE

"EMs take whatever they can. In Michigan, it's been parks, schools, pensions and yes, even water systems. Water is still systematically being shutoff in Detroit. In Flint, the water has even been poisoned—all as a result of arrogant EMs appointed by governors intent on exerting power and greed over poor people."

BAXTER JONES

"We must be very clear: Water is not man-made. Soda pop is man-made. Water is life: "Mni Wiconi!" We have an inalienable right to life. When our community is at risk, each one of us is at risk, whether we admit it or not. When we are deprived of water, our life existence is threatened, and we are obligated to defend ourselves by whatever means necessary."

JOAN SMITH

"The world is abundant with beauty. It is that beauty which makes me know that we can do better for ourselves, our communities, and our planet. It is that beauty which teaches me to challenge white supremacy and other forms of oppression."

DAVID OLSEN

"We're like a third world country . . . I don't see how they can cut off water to the elderly, or kids, or anybody. I don't feel like we've won the case. I think we should've been out blocking the trucks the next day."

REVEREND BILL WYLIE-KELLERMANN

"Initially for me the shut-off of water simply distilled the issues of Emergency Management: corporate fascism, privatization, the assault on democracy, calculated racism, and expelling poor people for the geographic restructuring of Detroit. But in the course of the past three years, water has more and more become a way, spiritually and politically, into how we live on the planet, the commons as a basis of community and justice, an understanding of human (and creaturely) rights, the sacredness of life itself, and using our lives and bodies in support of all those."



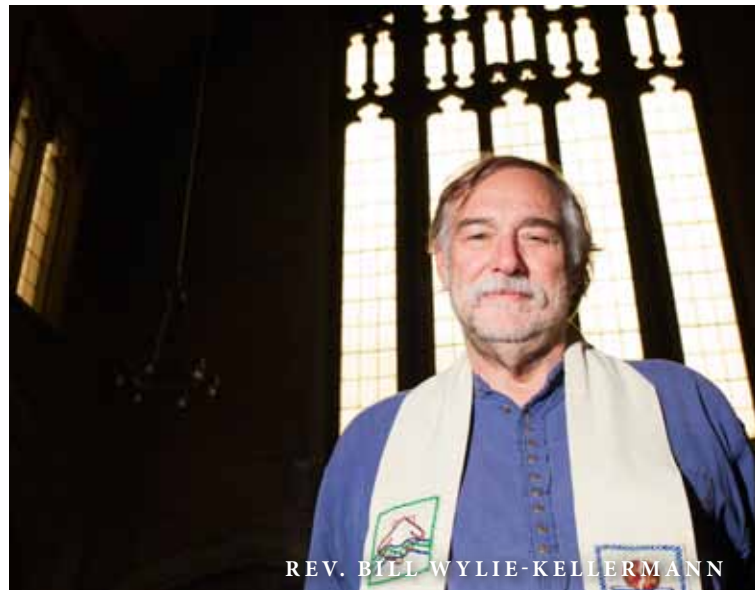
BAXTER JONES



JOAN SMITH



DAVID OLSEN



REV. BILL WYLIE-KELLERMANN



MARIAN KRAMER



HANS BARBE



A Freedom School Project

The Wright Museum Goes Green

BY ERIC THOMAS CAMPBELL AND ALYSON JONES TURNER

Museums are usually places that preserve the past. But the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History is also shaping the future. Since the very beginning it has challenged people to think differently about what we value about our history. As one of the first museums in the country devoted to African-American culture, it has placed the struggles of people for a just world at the heart of what it does. The Charles H. Wright Museum is an important place to nurture our young people in their commitment to social justice. This is why they have decided to support the emerging Independent Freedom School movement.

The museum's reinforcement of community-based education now includes housing a gardening program on a terrace of the Museum grounds. The raised-bed garden is another way in which the Charles H. Wright Museum is transcending institutional norms.

"The whole spiritual concept of planting something and removing the weeds and nurturing it and seeing it grow and then being able to eat, it's a way for not only the children, but the parents to know that you have to have a place where you can grow your own food," Charles H. Wright Museum Vice-President Charles Ferrell told *Riverwise*. "You know it's clean, it's organic. There are multiple reasons why this sends a higher message to the community around self-determination."

Responding to the State-led dismantling of the Detroit public school system, the Detroit Independent Freedom Schools Movement (DIFS) was initiated in 2016 by a group of activists from Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management (D-REM). D-REM activists organized initial meetings to bring together local educators, groups involved in education advocacy as well as enthusiastic volunteers to give birth to DIFS.

Photos by Gloria House (top), Piper Carter (second and third), and Gloria House (bottom)

Charles H. Wright Museum CEO Juanita Moore specifically credits Dr. Gloria House, a D-REM member, with spearheading the effort and understanding "the broad need to educate these young people...not just about what they should learn in the classrooms, but the broader lessons about how to live complete lives; the health and wholeness of their bodies; the longevity and quality of their life and the lives of families and other people around them. A lot of that revolves around food, especially in our community and especially in Detroit."

Inspired by the Freedom Schools of the South that flourished during the Civil Rights movement, DIFS offers free, African-centered, enriching educational experiences for Detroit's children and families with the assistance of the community volunteers.

During their first year, DIFS organized four sites across the city. Each site worked to provide children with opportunities to learn and grow surrounded by adults who love and care about them. Curriculum is determined by the site coordinators working with families, children and volunteers.

The Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History offered space for DIFS educators during the 2016–2017 school year. As the educational activities for children grew, family members began to meet with organizers to spread awareness around issues that affect our children in public education.

Bianca Danzy began her relationship with the DIFS as a parent and volunteer saying, she "fell in love with what was going on there." Already an established figure in the urban farming community through her venture, 'Real Food By Bianca', she urged DIFS coordinators to incorporate a green space into the learning environment. Danzy now heads the youth gardening program for the DIFS at the Charles H. Wright Museum. Her gardening class is derived from a program and book called, "A Taste of African Heritage", in which students grow vegetables specifically for preparing meals that emphasize nutrition and African culture.

"Everything I do is plant-based, to show the children, especially Black children, that we can eat sustainably and it can be delicious," Danzy told *Riverwise*.

The construction and design of the DIFS garden was implemented by DIFS volunteers active at the Museum, under the direction of Kwamena Mensah. Mensah is one of the founding members of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) and the former farm manager at D-Town Farms. The site was chosen partly for its full exposure to the sun, allowing a longer growing season, Mensah told *Riverwise*. He says DIFS students plan on growing up to 30 different vegetable varieties, including hot and cold crops, for harvest at various times of the year.

Wright Museum administrators maintain that the evolving mission of the Museum to not only educate, but to integrate with its supporters and the community around it. CEO Moore says that it is vital to host the Detroit Independent Freedom School's efforts not only from an educational perspective, but from a historical perspective. The Freedom School represents a recent history of Black people 'making a way from no way' whether in the 1960s, the Jim Crow South, or now, in a post-industrial, State-controlled urban climate.

"I think that this Museum sets that kind of example, that in this place you can have a garden, you can do that work," Moore says. "I think teaching those kinds of lessons is really important and that's what this Museum should be doing."

The DIFS garden is just one part of the Charles H. Wright Museum's commitment to progressive programming. Over the last several months, the Museum has presented a jam-packed schedule of speakers and panels on all facets of the movement for Black liberation, both nationally and locally, as part of an ongoing exhibit and extensive program around the 1967 Rebellion.

According to Vice-President Ferrell, the Charles H. Wright is expanding the definition of a Museum in many other ways. They have embraced an outreach program to prisoners; they are also making international connections through educational tours that will take students and educators to the Caribbean for presentations by historians like Randall Robinson.

But it's the garden on the terrace that provides immediate opportunities for children to observe nature at its finest, providing sustenance for the body and the mind.

"As a history museum and a sacred place, we want to be an example of how to use limited space to grow food," Ferrell says. "We want to lead and embrace the garden because it really offers a lot of educational opportunities. It's another way that the Charles Wright is attempting to be more than just a museum—but to also be a center for the community to come and say, this is our institution."

For more information on the Detroit Independent Freedom Schools, visit www.d-rem.org/freedom-schools.

Raised on Detroit's northwest side, Eric Thomas Campbell is the co-ordinator of *Riverwise Magazine* and a member of the editorial staff. Eric worked as a staff writer for the *Michigan Citizen Newspaper* from 2007-2012, covering a wide range of issues affecting Detroit's majority Black community. He has frequently written press releases for the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center.



Photos by Gloria House (top), Piper Carter (second), and Gloria House (third and bottom)

Riverwise Community Calendar

pod, 2017
Materials: stinging nettle,
soil, plastic globe

9/12

Scott Kurashige Book Lecture, "50 Years of Rebellion: How the US Political Crisis Began In Detroit"

CHARLES H. WRIGHT MUSEUM OF
AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY
313-494-5800, INFO@THEWRIGHT.ORG

9/16

Detroit Independent Freedom School Classes

CHARLES H. WRIGHT MUSEUM OF
AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY
EVERY SATURDAY, 10:00-1:00 P.M.
313-583-9395, DIFS313@GMAIL.COM

9/16-9/17

10th Annual D-Town Farm Harvest Festival

D-TOWN FARM
14027 W. OUTER DRIVE
NOON-6 P.M., SATURDAY AND SUNDAY
313-345-3663

9/21

*International Peace Prayer Celebration,
hosted by Voices for Earth Justice and
Capuchin Soup Kitchen with guest speakers
Naim Edwards and Rochelle Riley*

ST. BONAVENTURE MONASTERY CHAPEL
1740 MOUNT ELLIOTT STREET
6:00-8:00 P.M.

9/23

*Noble Outdoor Classroom Garden Tour,
2-6 p.m. in conjunction with Riverwise
Community Conversation, 4:30-6 p.m.*

12408 WISCONSIN (At the corner of Fullerton)
313-334-2460

9/23

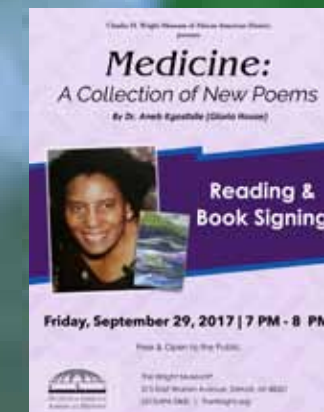
*Critical Conversation on the Education Crisis
in Detroit, sponsored by Detroit Independent
Freedom Schools Movement in conjunction
with the national We Choose Campaign*

CHARLES H. WRIGHT MUSEUM OF
AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY
1:00-3:30 P.M.

9/29

*Poetry Performance and Book Debut of
Medicine: New and Selected Poems by
Aneb Kgositsile (Gloria House)*

CHARLES H. WRIGHT MUSEUM OF
AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY
7:00 P.M.
313-494-5800, INFO@THEWRIGHT.ORG



10/22

Riverwise Community Conversation

ST. DAVID'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
16200 W. 12 MILE ROAD,
SOUTHFIELD, MI 48076
11:30 A.M.
248-557-5430

10/27-10/29

*13th annual Great Lakes Bioneers
Detroit Conference '1967-Revolution To
Evolution-2017'*

MARYGROVE COLLEGE
8425 W. MCNICHOLS RD. (MC#409),
DETROIT, MI 48221
313-717-6151, WWW.GLBD.ORG

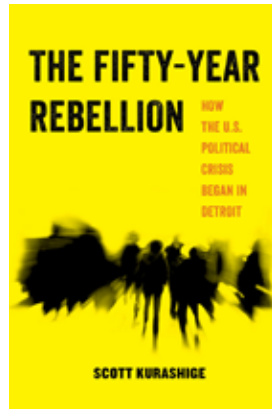
11/9-11/11

Place Based Education Conference

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
STUDENT CENTER
900 OAKWOOD STREET,
YPSILANTI, MI. 48197
517-371-7468, INFO@GLSTEWARDSHIP.ORG

So Goes the Nation?

The Fifty Year Rebellion by Scott Kurashige; University of California Press, 2017



The Fifty-Year Rebellion invites us to consider Detroit's recent history as both epitomizing and shaping national trends. But it's not the kind of invitation we've all grown used to.

We've heard the warnings: Detroit is

America's "canary in the coal mine," signaling to the rest of the country how toxic the air is growing. And since the birthplace of the American Dream is now the poster-child of post-industrial decline, we've all heard how, "as goes Detroit, so goes the nation."

These clichés are usually wielded as counsels of despair. Not only do they cast Detroit as a place consumed by doom and gloom, they also strip us all of our agency, conjuring images of an unavoidable spiral into unemployment, neighborhoods ravaged by school closings, water shutoffs, shuttered houses, broken promises and shattered dreams.

Far less common are reminders that Detroit is the home of incalculable collective power—a place brimming with the brilliance of visionary organizers, the seedbed of so many other ways to keep on going on, quietly sowing and growing together.

As Grace Lee Boggs once put it, Detroiters have long been "very conscious of our city as a movement city." In *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, Scott Kurashige skillfully reinvigorates this consciousness, teaching us to think about the overlapping crises of our city, country, and planet from below.

From this vantage point, systematic disinvestment, emergency management, and bankruptcy are all part of a decades-long effort to stamp out the liberatory energies that erupted in '67, and are still pulsing through the city today. These

are reactions born of white fear and feelings of growing irrelevancy on the part of the capitalist class: fear of black political power, of the collective strength of workers, and of the swagger of Detroiters demonstrating more humane ways of surviving and thriving together while capitalism writhes and dies in the background.

Long before the election of Donald Trump—who rode a groundswell of right-wing populism, racism, and xenophobia, promising to "make America great again"—Detroiters were plenty familiar with forced "revitalization" in the name of former greatness.

As Kurashige points out, many key elements that marked the rise of Trump had already facilitated the state takeover, the bankruptcy of Detroit, and the corporate restructuring of the city: voter disenfranchisement, the gutting of workers' rights, the pillaging of public goods and institutions, and authoritarian rule by superwealthy "outsiders" (Snyder as Michigan's Trump).

Kurashige develops three key arguments: first, the "counter-revolution" we are confronting is a reaction to a 50-year rebellion; second, the overlapping political and economic crises confronting us today are a product of the neoliberal turn; and third, despite the immense hardships its peoples have endured, Detroit remains most significant as a city of hope.

There is much to be rejected in the age of emergency managers and gameshow presidents. Nevertheless, Kurashige emphasizes that Detroit's visionary organizers "have moved from the 'rejections' defining the stage of rebellion to the 'projections' necessary to revolutionize the way we live, work, and sustain community." Growing food in vacant lots and producing life's necessities with community-based technologies "can offer the proletariat a new method to own the means of production"—if only the city's devalued lands can be protected and preserved while Detroiters continue "building the social consciousness and relationships necessary to unleash the greatest potential of the post-industrial epoch."

Ultimately, the decades-long battle to redefine and reshape Detroit "provides a window into the epochal conflict between two alternative futures": one characterized by authoritarian rule by the superwealthy, the other by the steady spread of participatory democracy. Insofar as Detroit's most creative organizers are helping to tip the scales towards the more promising of the two futures, it is because they embody "an intercommunal form of localism that seeks to connect with place-based struggles around the globe that refuse to be absorbed into a dehumanizing and unsustainable system."

This is a book to be shared with everyone hoping to keep tipping the scales. It helpfully heals historical amnesia, centers everyday people as creators of change, and moves us next to each other, where we keep turning to turn things around.

Mike Doan is a community-based activist in Detroit where he has lived for five years. He works with Detroiters REsisting Emergency Management, the Detroit Independent Freedom Schools Movement and the Boggs Center To Nurture Community Leadership. He is also a Professor of Philosophy.

ABOUT THE BACK COVER ARTIST

Ash Arder is a Detroit-based, interdisciplinary artist and designer who creates objects and experiences that investigate and re-imagine the relationship between people and natural environments.

This work relies on the cultivation and research of live plants throughout each stage of their lifecycle, including the process and potential of plants to create fiber and other industrial materials. Ash combines personal memories with fictional narratives to create future worlds and scenarios that challenge the way objects are consumed and used.

"Each work depicts stinging nettle in some way. I forage for the plants in Detroit and then hand process them into fiber. Some of these works explore alternative ways of growing the nettle, and others make use of the fiber and/or the byproduct of the fiber-making process."



Cabinet, 2016, Materials: mixed media



Pulp studies, 2016
Materials: stinging nettle pulp



Strange Fruit, 2015

Materials: stinging nettle fiber, faux apples, paper