



Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution

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This new South End Press edition makes available the full text of this out-of-print classic--along with a new foreword by Manning Marable, interviews with participants in DRUM, and reflections on political developments over the past three decades by Georgakas and Surkin.

Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution Details

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From Reader Review Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution for online ebook

Kobe Bryant says

Very cool. I like the manifesto word poem. "friday nite...get that check/carry it on home to the crib(with wife and kids), then get out on the street: get fucked up/(reefer, jones, coke, ups & downs, johnnie walker black and red)try to freeze your head/can't think about the shit starting all over again on monday/"

Alex says

Largely about the formation, activism, and collapse of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, I read an early edition from 1975. There's a newer one with a Where Are They Now sort of update section which I was able to peruse, and wish I had now.

Angela says

Intro: Detroit 1970s. "The city of problems". The New Detroit Committee was self appointed committee of Ford, GM, Chrystler, gas and department store chairmen. Intended to put an end to urban unrest by replacing inner city squalor with new office buildings, banks, condos, etc. Poor people, blacks, and appalachians, were removed from the city core and replaced with upper class representatives. Stopgap anti-poverty programs were used as short-term responses to street violence. Black politicians and businessmen were given more roles. The police was desegregated and strengthened. In first 6 years of NDC- Detroit sunk to all time low. Homes were destroyed as a result of corruption in public and private lending institutions. Homicide rates dramatically increased. Detroit revolutionaries worked to control the economy-the real term of power. This meant controlling the shop floor at the point of production.

James Johnson- auto worker at Eldon Avenue Gear- a plant of Chrystler. He was suspended after refusing to speed up. He came into work and shot 2 foremen and a job setter. Kenneth Cockrel was his lawyer. Fought an all white jury- getting a sexually and racially mixed jury. Jury found him not responsible for his acts after hearing testimony of his experience at the plant and a tour of the factory. They claimed responsibility was in the hands of Chrystler. Furthermore, the Motor City Labor League demanded he get paid worker compensation for the injuries done to him by Chrystler... successfully. He gets paid 75\$ a week since the day of the killing.

Chapter 1: Inner City Voice: a radical and militant newspaper, not meant to be alternative culture paper- but as one principled in opposition to dominant culture. Used the paper as a vehicle for political organization and education. Founders included people from SNCC, Freedom Now Party, RAM, UHURU, etc. Style was deliberately provocative. Characterized as having ability to present complicated ideological analyses of capitalism in a popular style- made leap from theory to practice seem automatic

Erok says

i really loved this book. it's a great document about a little known and recognized black revolutionary organization that were contemporaries of and overshadowed by the sexy, media savvy Black Panther Party.

It had the flow of a lot of counter-cultural and revolutionary books of the late sixties and early seventies. High on action, engaging, and real, and low on theory and talk of dead philosophers. Also like the books of that period, it leaves you in awe in what these dedicated folks were able to pull off.

Colleen says

The authors focus on a local, radical social group that organized primarily Black workers in the auto industry (GM, Ford and Chrysler) during the late 60s and early 70s. The Group focused on is the League of Revolutionary Black workers, and as someone who grew up in a suburb of Detroit, I can't believe I never heard of them. That says a lot. The writing is kind of like the League- it's not pretty and sometimes you wish it was better, but it does what it needs to and gets its point across, whether you like it or not.

Liz Latty says

if you read only one book about detroit in your lifetime, make it this one.

**november 17, 2011, re-reading right now because the world is on fire and we need to learn/keep learning from those who came before us.

Aaron says

An excellent history of an important movement. The lessons for activist strategy were also very useful. This book was a great counterpart to the other Detroit labor history book that I recently read.

James says

The text by Georgakas and Surkin looks at the rise and fall of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) which challenged both the Chrysler management and the UAW union leadership in the spirit of rising black nationalist militancy of the 1967 Detroit rising. DRUM spawned the League of Revolutionary Workers as other RUMs sprung up at other plants in the Detroit area, which operated in a sort of old Wobbly style of wildcat strikes, pushing for worker control (especially in places with majority black worker presence as Detroit became a majority black city), and linking outside the plant job discrimination, police brutality, and housing condition with inside the plant the worse jobs being reserved for blacks, increasingly dangerous conditions as Chrysler expected more output from workers, and the UAW leadership which had little black leadership nor an interest in transforming relationships on the shop floor as long as the company gave the workers raise increases, vacation, and retirement benefits. DRUM ran a slate of opposition in the UAW

Dodge plant but the international rigged the elections, which fueled more wildcats and organizing to bypass the class peace advocated by the UAW.

DRUM and the League are important dovetails to the story of Detroit, the Big 3, and the UAW, in that they were ultimately right, as the Big 3 launched a major offensive within a decade against the union that devastated its membership and reduced its power, long with Detroit itself losing more and more population and benefits. The League pushed a militancy within and around the UAW leadership that had been without a major opposition since the late 50s when Local 600 had been reduced in power, as well as the international which hadn't seen real caucus infighting since the late 40s when the Socialists with a corporatist (labor-management cooperation) focus pushed out the Communists with a syndicalist (worker control) focus. The UAW leadership helped break the wildcats, which was shortsighted and reflected how the union was breaking down between the old-guard Polish-American leadership coming from the old left (who usually weren't intimidated by corporate pressure) with the younger militants who were African-American, Arab, and Appalachian whites.

The League sadly split and disappeared as social militancy and Black Power receded into the mid 1970s, at a time when the union movement needed them. The possibilities of the league are an episode that have been much written about in recent years, of building a black nationalist with socialist direction within the existing institutions, and outside of them. The UAW for instance, did a poor job of listening to the concerns and demands of DRUM which served it poorly in the 70s-80s that saw corporate power unleash an assault on the autoworkers union that led it to need to majorly retool in the decades since (for better and for worse).

The book title comes from a song in the movie about DRUM, Finally Got The News, in which the singer declares while he doesn't mind working, he does mind dying. Much of the organizing happened around Wayne State University in Detroit, which had a huge UAW presence as many of its workers went there, and as such a perfect place for rank and file black workers to organize, as well as matching with growing national campus organizing. Though the league ended in infighting and dissolving, it presents an episode of putting politics into practice by black workers in other ways than the Black Panthers and SNCC and others.

Jonfaith says

This proved to be an early example of how powerful the university could be. this wasn't assigned; I happened upon it while wandering through the stacks. It isn't overly scholarly, it is largely an oral history. It shocked the hell out of me.

Johanna says

Pretty interesting and helpful for my job. People who care about Detroit might want to read it.

Shon says

One of those books that keeps you thinking and dreaming for years after...

The book starts with a high profile case of the time, a jury trial where the defendant is found innocent of

killing his boss at the auto plant - not because he didn't pull the trigger, but because, in the eyes of the jury of peers, as well of the judge, the boss deserved it. That's like, page 3, and it never lets up.

More utopian than Crimethinc could imagine, but unlike them (or the equally vapid 'revolutionaries' of the day), these folks had a PLAN, and you'll never believe how close it all was to coming down. Unless you read the book.

Allan says

This book was on my "to read list" for a long time. Too long really. It is a tremendous contribution to a rich history of radical organizing that goes beyond the typical paradigm of the panthers and white radicals on one end and conventional labor organizing on the other. The focus of the book is the Revolutionary Union Movements (RUMs) that were the product of the League of Black Revolutionary Workers in Detroit throughout 70s/80s. Not having been there, it is hard to say how honest a look it is, but the book doesn't seem to pull any punches. It lays out the pros and cons within the struggle. One of the most powerful lines from the book that stays with me actually comes from the introduction and can be applied to all forms of organizing - even the Occupy Wall street phenomena going on today: "We need to get out of this casino mentality." I don't have the book with me so it may not be an exact quote, but what it speaks to is that we need to not think that succeeding within the system for some is a way out. That it should not be the goal that get a seat at a table for a small handful and pat ourselves on the back when those token slots get filled. That is not winning for all, that is hitting the lottery for a few.

Flaquito Hernandez says

Great information on the auto worker organizing efforts of the 1960s and 70s, plus a wonderful snapshot of the political turmoil that swept through urban cities during the same time. This book will confirm your nasty reality of what "means of production" really amounts to.

Sarah says

I read this for my community organizing class, and I highly recommend it to anyone. It was enjoyable to read and an interesting history even if you have no interest in organizing. My father worked in a general motors plant in Michigan for his entire career, but labor organizing and the details of factory work were topics I had never understood in-depth. This book was a fantastic attempt to document the efforts of revolutionary black workers in Detroit in the late 60s-early 70s. It also is a powerful commentary on working conditions in the auto industry, the role of the UAW in worker oppression, and an insightful look at the social conditions of Detroit at the time.

This book made me want to learn everything I can about labor organizing, Detroit, and revolutionary movements. It also makes me want to have some in-depth conversations with my dad. The only problem I had with the book was that the histories aren't presented in any chronological order, but by theme, so it can become a little difficult to follow the chronology and connection between events.

Alex says

Incredible promise that went unfulfilled. This is how I would summarize the history of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, which existed primarily in Detroit and its many auto plants around the late 60s-early 70s. This book is excellently written, bringing the reader into a high-point of movement activity that saw for example workers shooting their bosses and being acquitted because of unsafe working conditions, among other victories that seem astonishing in the rear-view mirror 40 years later.

Things have changed, but this book does well to humanize and contextualize the organizing efforts of those involved in the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) and affiliated organizations during that time. This isn't just a trip down nostalgia lane. Figures such as General Baker, Ken Cockrel, and Mike Hamlin are shown to be complete human beings, with flaws, but with remarkable talent as well, and the strategies they employed are discussed and elaborated to make for a compelling read. Another key to this book's brilliance is the explanation of the dynamic between the traditional bureaucratic, reformist (and somewhat racist) union, the United Auto Workers (UAW), and the League with its revolutionary black politics. It's partially a study in co-optation - at one point the UAW physically prevents a strike from taking place, and forces workers back to work! Amazing stuff.

The book is not perfect - for example it contains a rather long commentary from a white worker/organizer at one of the plants which is not matched by commentaries from the black organizers who organized ELRUM at that plant. Another drawback is the seemingly sectarian approach the authors take towards certain movement actors, such as James Forman. Not that strategies should not be criticized, but they get a little personal here in my opinion.

Regardless, it's a hell of a book, and more than anything it teaches you about the immense tragedy and lingering hope that was/is the city of Detroit. Leading up to the US Social Forum next June in that city, pick this up for some amazing history about the town.
