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
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
Masters of motion
And people be makin' some noise in this city
Raisin' hell in this city
Like ancestors before
Quick jobs and daily scabs can't quiet us

Self-Portrait

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 747's 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

BY ANGELA JONES

Photo by Marisol Teachwort
A Choice Between Two Worlds

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 follow the QLine as more than just another infrastructure project. The capacity of stories to change us is exemplified wonderfully in the Pedal To Porch program initiated by Corey 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 much-needed contributions from the people who are actively reimagining and reorganizing society from the ground up. It is 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-disciplinary 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 the grassroots activism changing lives in historical neighborhoods’. We quickly realized the power of stories being told by the people themselves. Narratives from the people consciously reimagining 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 rebellion and revolution buried 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.

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 Corey 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 the output. Gardening is moving from growing to 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 heightened 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. Those 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.

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In keeping with this edition’s attention to the natural world, 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 camera, the seeds of revolution 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 rebellion and revolution buried 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
Mission Statement

'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.

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.

Through media that serves as an essential part of weaving beloved communities, we envision deepening relationships 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' needs your stories of resilience, visionary resistance, place-based education, self determination and sustainable, creative ways of transforming yourselves and your communities.

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

In love and struggle,
The Riverwise Collective
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 system, 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. The project is the culmination of Gilbert’s already controversial and long-lasting (since the early 1990s) efforts to rebrand the city, providing

direct free wi-fi

service

to the city. With its 25-gigabit internet provider, The QLINE maps Gilbert’s takeover of Detroit.

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 fiber optic 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 a prime real estate development 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 route and expansion possible that pioneers, settlers, and military depended on for survival. Well known as the first paved highway in the United States, Woodward was constructed from about 1844 to the mid-century using prison labor, repeatedly forcing the removal of residents and businesses. Further development along the highway in the mid-1870s 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 birth to the automobile industry and helped to fuel suburbanization. With his properties secured in downtown Detroit, Gilbert has driven the current period of investment with a distinct entrepreneurial advantage. As Detroit put the country on wheels, it gave birth to the automobile industry and helped to fuel suburbanization. With his properties secured in downtown Detroit, Gilbert has driven the current period of investment with a distinct entrepreneurial advantage.

The QLINE project is Gilbert’s appropriation of “exclusionary gentrification.” Using this technique, the scheme involved fiber optic cables installed below the QLINE, forming the “spine” of Rocket Fiber’s in-ground infrastructure, connecting Wayne State University to Campus Martius, what we’ve come to know as Gilmoreville. 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 wi-fi service to the QLINE and at the 14 tram 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 wi-fi 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 financial services. He wants them to pay rent and buy into the new network at his downtown properties. 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 resilient nature made the city visible to tourists seeking tales of desolation and rebirth of the American Dream. Gilbert’s Trojan Horse: Capturing the City Core.
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 city’s landscape into a blank canvas for their imaginations.

In 2014, Gilbert made his pitch at the Tech-Church. 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 Crisply, 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.

To understand what all this tech development means to Detroiters, just take 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-based on Gilbert’s One Campus Martius property.

More importantly, “creative city” initiatives help to deflect criticism from gentrification by recasting arts and technology as the “indigenous culture” of 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 industrial 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 inlet—rather than a beneficiary and legislator—of settler colonial conditions. The architects of Detroit’s bankruptcy, like Dan Gilbert, have perpetuated these conditions through displacement 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. 

Despite the hegemonic force of Emergency Management and its related technologies of exploitation and dispossession, Detroiters have not been silent. Detroters Reimagining Emergency Management organized fire-fighters, welfare rights advocates, activists, and community organizations to lead protests such as the Motorown Shutdowns 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 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, WNYC community radio station in the Trainyard, 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 can they do it without duplicating the systems of dispossession and disillusion the move is meant to combat.

My father owned one pair of gym shoes for as long as I can remember. Literally ONE pair. He had a few pairs of flip flops for the entire family, 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 for their own networks, and the question is, how can they do it without duplicating the systems of dispossession and disillusion the move is meant to combat.

“...we believe and wish to practice uplifting our community wealth and creativity; putting less into the wastestream; reclaiming practices for meeting our needs without money; and empowering ourselves by re-evaluating what is valuable.”

—Free Market of Detroit

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and think about how we can share and better ask them to make a pledge to pay it forward or way. And if folks show up without anything, we Everyone is entered into the circle of giving this useful items together are all ways that we enjoy gift from someone you know, and co-creating the object, knowing you gave or received a story of stuff.org

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 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, it’s 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!

The Noble Outdoor Classroom: Native Species Transform the Community

BY LINDA GADSDEN

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 maintain 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 sensors 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
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 Crocuses. 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 Pink plant and will be surrounded with rescued Hosta plants. The benefit of the Seniors in the garden planting process was most clearly displayed during the difficulty of locating Milkweed and Onion plants. Unbeknown 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 alongside 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 Heelosum 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 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 on the back with Periwinkle rescued from an abandoned house on Indiana.

Additional plantings include Butterfly Weed, Bee Balm and assorted perennials. Additional plantings 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 Full 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 area to the left of the Fall Garden was left in a woodland state. It contains an unidentifiable 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 interest 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!
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 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 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.

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.
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 sit down and stop challenging us?” Many inquire, “What will it take to get you rebels to sit 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 our ancestors fought so hard to have a place at the table 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 sit 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 60 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 resilience. 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 the intention of utilizing the space to carry out our mission: to deepen our connections to one another and sense of wonder for the planet with. We also draw from indigenous knowledge, permaculture principles, and our liberation.

Sowing the Seeds of Self-Determination

BY NAIM EDWARDS

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 sit 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.

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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, has 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
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 felt 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 sculling 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 Pedal to Porch 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.

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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.

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.

EMs take whatever they can. In Michigan, it's been parks, schools, pensions and yes, even water systems. Water is still systematically being shut off 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 geographies 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.
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 is about growing and 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, families involved in education advocacy as well as 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 post-industrial, State-controlled urban climate.

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 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.

“...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 Kawanema Mensah. Mensah is one of the founding members of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) and the former farm manager of the City of Detroit 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.

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 wellness of their bodies, the longevity and quality of their lives 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.

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’ 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.

It’s not just 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 offers a lot of educational opportunities. It’s another way that the Charles Wright is attempting to be more than just a museum—but also to 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-rems.org/freedom-schools.

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

Raised on Detroit’s northwest side, Eric Thomas Campell is the co-editor 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.
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.
313-283-9395, DIRS313@GMAIL.COM

9/16–9/17
10th Annual D-Town Farm Harvest Festival
D-TOWN FARM
14027 W. OUTER DRIVE
NOON–8 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,
SOUTHELFIELD, 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
910 OAKWOOD STREET,
YPSILANTI, MI 48197
517-377-7468, 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 warning: 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 counsel of despair. Not only do they cast Detroit as a place consumed by doom and gloom, they also strip us of our agency, conjuring images of an unavoidable spiral into unemployment, neighborhoods razed 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, quietly sowing and growing together. As Grace Lee Boggs once put it, Detroiters demonstrating more humane ways of surviving and thriving together while capitalism withers 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 arguments 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 “counter-revolution”; 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 making life’s necessities with community-based technologies “can offer the potential of plants to create food and other industrial materials. Ash combines personal memories with fictional narratives to create future scenarios that challenge the way objects are consumed and used.” Each work depicts stinging nettle in some way. “Each work depicts stinging nettle in some way. 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.”

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. Inside Detroit as America’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 helps heal 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 Detroits Blaxing Emergency Management, the Detroit Independent Freedom Schools Movement and the Boggs Center To Unlearn Community Leadership. He is also a Professor of Philosophy.
Strange Fruit, 2015
Materials: stinging nettle fiber, faux apples, paper