

Trashin' Wayne

Ripple (Red)

1970

There's a lot of garbage down by the freeway.

It was early afternoon, clear and warm. We piled the garbage into the truck and headed towards Wayne State. "We" were about nine or ten brothers and sisters from People Concerned About Urban Renewal and the Young Prides. We were black and white, young and old, students and neighborhood people.

Riding in the back of the truck with those bags of garbage we joked and shouted and gave the fist to people on the street. We were headed for the Wayne State "Teach-in" on ecology.

Wayne's "Community Arts" building looked like an urban planner/architect's dream—no litter on the lawn, the building clean, bright and efficient in the sunlight, filled to capacity with students wearing bell-bottoms.

We walked in there carrying this garbage. I felt weird waiting around in the hallway holding a bag of garbage and looking at the people.

We got inside the auditorium from the side door and the campus pigs spotted us. One had a blue blazer on, short blond haircut and a worried look on his face. Another was in pig drag, fat face with glasses. They tossed me out.

So I went up to where they had the closed-circuit TV sets. I could see the people moving around in there with signs: "This is Wayne's Garbage," "Wayne's Urban Renewal Pollutes Our Community," "Wayne Uses Pollution to Drive Us From Our Homes."

The audience couldn't handle it. When Jimmy grabbed the mike and began to talk, they yelled at him to shut up. When he asked simply, "Is Wayne State University part of this community?" they sat there. When he said, "Wayne State wants to destroy our homes in order to build a bunch of dormitories for students" they applauded. Then they cut the sound and Ralph Nader came on.

I stood there, thinking about the ecology movement, while Nader was running his rap.

One girl had gotten up in there to tell Jimmy that by opposing urban renewal he and his people were standing in the way of progress.

Can you dig it? Is that where those people were at? Do they think that urban renewal is really good for ALL the people? Do they think poor people can afford the "low cost housing" (\$125 per month for one bedroom) they're planning for us?

Or was that girl really saying that poor people ought to get out of the way of people like herself, who like to commute in from Birmingham to a tidy little campus like Wayne without having to notice the neighborhood.

What good would it do to argue to her that the nature of that neighborhood is largely determined by the university? That the people know that Wayne and the city want them off the land? Fuck it. Who wants to maintain property you know is going to be ripped off by something more powerful than you?

Dig it. By dumping the bags of garbage on the stage where the ecology teach-in was going on, we were asking the audience to consider urban renewal in the same light as ecology.

Ecology is the study of the survival struggle of different species within a biological system. It's not just a question of adaptation. It's a question of relative power as well.

Urban renewal is part of a power struggle too. It's a power play of the ruling elite to contain, control or eliminate everyone in the inner city. Under capitalism, urban renewal is always going to be run in the interest of the same class that pollutes the environment and then tries to convince us that the problem comes from our backyard incinerators and barbeque sets rather than from their smoke stacks.

That's too abstract. In San Francisco urban renewal simply means that the poor people who live in the Mission District and around the waterfront are being pushed into the sea so that the businessmen can build a "Wall Street of the West" down by the bay to serve as headquarters for their economic empire in the Pacific.

In Detroit urban renewal means that the Cass-Woodward corridor from downtown to the GM building would be reserved for heavy commercial development, with an island of medical facilities and an island of cultural ornament set aside in the Wayne State area. And they just want to wipe out the people who live there now.

So anyhow, we just hung around while Nader was talking. Later, a few people from the audience stayed to ask the community people what the whole set was all about. But it was pretty clear that they were mainly showing polite interest. Something was missing.

Maybe it was the fact that a community is pulling together in the University-II area through the experience of the people's struggle with the university and the city. And few people in the audience were ready for that. You can't really dig on that sense of community and struggle except by participating in it.

Back over by the freeway with all the garbage...It's nicer weather these days. We're doing community clean-up on Saturdays.

It's like working for a few hours with a shovel or rake and then stepping back to dig on what the people together are able to do. Or having some local person come up to you and press a dollar bill into your hand and tell you to buy cokes for everyone, that what you're doing is "for the people."

It's like the first time I ever really began to dig on what Chairman Fred Hampton of the Black Panther Party was saying when he said that you didn't have to do dope to get high. The sweetest high was when you're high on the people.

If you live around Wayne State and want to get into it, the People's Community Project comes together at 9:30 a.m. Saturdays between Forest and Lysander on Lincoln Street.

fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #103, April 15-29, 1970

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)