

Detroit, Demolished by Design: Violence, Racism, and Collapse of Community

reprint from FE #335, Winter 1990–91

Lynne Clive (Marilynn Rashid)

The tales of violence go on-and-on.

There is a bold arrogance that comes with class privilege and economic security and comfort. Certainly there are exceptions, but for the most part there is little or no sympathy in affluent communities for the plight of the poor, the homeless, the unemployed.

¿“Te compadeces de los destechados?” I asked one of my students, after explaining the Spanish verbal phrase “to sympathize with” and the noun for the homeless, “los destechados.” No, he answered, in slow, perfect Spanish, I don’t sympathize with the homeless. And when asked why not, he confidently explained that there were plenty of jobs for people if they really wanted to work, and then went on to complain about welfare fraud. A middle-class black student, whose family recently moved to the suburbs from the city, denounced AIDS victims, telling me they got what they deserved, they made their choices, opted to take drugs, chose to be gay or not to use condoms.

What I would like to see and hear in response to this crisis is a massive popular outcry condemning consumerism, industrial capitalism, patriarchy, and progress--while affirming community and the strength of individuals to direct their own destinies and meet their own needs. And here, the self divides, for there is nothing but naive, idealistic, rhetoric--words that mean little or nothing from within the monster. We’re talking Detroit reality here.

Within this context, there is little hope of any radical transformation. Sorting through the layered complexities of violence and racism in our city brings no solace.

We’re left wringing our hands and driving our cars down freeways that we know have irreparably fractured our connections with each other.

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/368-369-spring-summer-2005/detroit-demolished-design-violence-racism-collapse-community>
Fifth Estate #368-369, Spring-Summer, 2005

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