

We're gonna live here

The development of people willing to fight for their land is all that will stop the University and the City.

Kae Halonen

1969

Back in the “uncivilized” days of American history, when a company or government wanted land they killed or drove off the people who lived there and claimed the land as their own.

The Indians were the first to feel the Man’s wrath. The Indian land was needed for “progress”—factories and railroads—and so foot by foot the Indians were driven West with guns, firewater and treachery.

Geronimo and his Apaches resisted the Man with guns—but by then it was too late. They were driven onto reservations in the desert along with the rest of America’s original inhabitants.

In the 1850s, the country of Mexico stood in the way of the U.S. government’s goal of expansion across North America to the Pacific Ocean. The U.S. declared war on Mexico over a minor border dispute, penetrated far into southern Mexico below the Rio Grande River and then “compromised” to steal only the Mexican Lands north of the Rio Grande. When the railroads were moving West, private land-owners and cooperatives already owned much of the land. So the government displaced the farmers and ranchers that stood in the way of progress, paying them a fraction of what their land was worth. They then turned around and sold these government grants to the railroad monopolies at bargain prices.

The railroads thus owned not only the right of way for train tracks, but also the adjacent land necessary for industries, granaries and stockyards. As cities grew up along the railroad routes, the railroad monopolies were already the owners of the prime downtown real estate.

This is how the railroad monopolists made a tremendous contribution to American history and tremendous fortunes as well. Dig the flick “The Wild Bunch” if you don’t believe it.

But civilization and prosperity did away with these barbaric practices...or, did it?

Today, instead of “progress” the word is “redevelopment” or “renewal”. But the stakes are the same—territory, turf, control over the land I live on 4th and Hancock—a piece in a larger land area called U-2. Wayne State University, in cooperation with the city of Detroit, wants my home and the land it sits on. Wayne State is a large landowner in Detroit. It not only owns the 140 acres of the main campus, but also a large plot in the middle of the new medical center and land for the Medical School in Lafayette Park.

In its University City Project Wayne State plans to own or control an additional 240 acres. U-2 covers 120 gross acres of the total University City Project.

The decision to “redevelop” our land was made over 10 years ago. During these 10 years they’ve been messing around with our neighborhood. None of the officials have come around to ask us what we want and what we need. We don’t fit the image of how they want the University and the City to look.

What they have done is to hold public hearings and meetings to tell us how and when they plan to move us out.

The 10 years have been used to run the neighborhood down so bad that people will have to move; and property will be assessed low enough to assure lots of cheap land.

During these past years, landlords have let the places go, either because they couldn't get permits to fix homes up or because they are slum-lords living off of poverty. City Services have been cut back to save the city some money; houses that are abandoned or burnt out are left standing for rats, roaches, to thrive, and politicians to put up posters with promises of a New Detroit every four years.

The specific plans for the area keep changing. There is talk about new housing at \$125.00 a month for a one bedroom apartment. There is a lot of emphasis on the need for additional classroom buildings, laboratories and parking lots. At a recent community meeting, William R. Keast, President of Wayne, made it clear to the people that Wayne can "legally only be concerned with the faculty, students, and staff of the University"...and that any building carried out in U-2 will serve those interests.

It appears that Wayne State and the City have dreams of a bright, shiny, plastic neighborhood of richies insulated, like pioneers with their wagon trains in a circle, from us, the Indians. These interests are counter to most of us living in the neighborhood now.

People live in U-2 for one of three reasons; (1) It is centrally located, near bus-lines, schools and downtown; (2) flight from the cultural political poverty of the suburbs, or economic poverty of the South; (3) it's the only neighborhood where relatively cheap housing for families exists.

Our community is basically residential with most stores on either Third or Trumbull. There are over 366 families in the neighborhood; 69 black families and 297 white families. Half of us have incomes of \$5000.00 a year; one fifth of us have incomes under \$2400.00.

My neighbors are all different kinds of people—students, professors, freaks, workers, kids, old people, tenants and landowners. We are an inner-city neighborhood with all the school, police, landlord, city tensions pushed on all people living in the guts of Amerikan capitalism.

This is the neighborhood, torn apart by racism prior to July 1967, that came together during the rebellion to off the stores, mock the Pigs, and learn some little feeling for power. The Expansionists in trying to force their nightmare on us, forget we have dreams too. It seems they should have learned something from the streets in July, but they didn't.

Our dreams aren't all that complicated. Many of us need new housing to replace the Wayne-City created slums we're living in now. The whole community could use parks and recreation centers. Everybody would dig having some roses and healthy trees. The dreams are there—our job is to build the political power that makes those dreams a reality.

In August a group of people came together and formed an organization called People Concerned About Urban Renewal (PCAUR). Our main strategy is to develop block clubs throughout U-2.

Secondly, we are supporting a Model-Cities Governing Board law suit against the City, halting all acquisition, and demolition until there is citizen control of money and planning, and until there are adequate relocation plans for any people choosing to move. The third part of PCAUR strategy is to build support for the community on Wayne's campus.

We have had the seeds of a community in our neighborhood for a long time. In our organizing we have found only a few people who really want out. Most who do are homeowners who can get some money and have someplace to go.

Very few of the people argue with the dreams, our divisions come from feeling our enemies are too strong and "you can't fight city hall". People hold their dreams in isolation.

The PCAUR strategy of block clubs is an attempt to break down the isolation. The development of people willing to fight for their land is all that will stop the University and the City. Beginning now to develop our ideas for the neighborhood is the main political direction for the block clubs.

This is backed up by a growing attitude that "we aren't asking what their plans are—We're telling them what ours are." In my neighborhood (4th and Hancock Block Club) a few of us have been talking to our neighbors, we have started a newsletter to communicate with those that don't come to the meetings, and we are starting to formulate our plans with the assistance of advocate planners.

My neighbor, Dan, is starting to talk about the possibility of developing cooperative housing and making a recreation center out of an old, structurally sound, abandoned house. Up on Forest a family has begun to take on their landlord—with the support of their friends and neighbors, has the man running.

All of this is only a beginning. As the Expansionists begin applying more pressure, people will have to seek a way of fighting. We may lose in the short run, but a particular tactical defeat or victory doesn't determine the long range results. We aren't alone.

Amerikan-Imperialism is international, as well as national. Wayne State pushing us off our land is a part of the same process that created US aggression against Vietnam; and attempted domination of Latin America, Canada and Western Europe. The issues raised in U-2 around my house, hits on the core of resistance to Amerikan power. Fight for land is basic to our survival—fight for power is basic to our revolution. We will keep putting it together. We have no choice.

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