

**Egalitarian Metropolis:  
Urban Studies, Urban Design & Social Justice in Detroit**

Winter 2022

RCSSCI 360-003/Arch 409-003

T/TH 2:30-4:00

Mason Hall – Central Campus – Room 1448

**Instructors:**

Dr. Vincent Carducci  
vcardu@umich.edu

Dr. Robert Fishman  
fishmanr@umich.edu

**Overview**

What does/can/should an egalitarian metropolis look like? And how does a focus on Detroit allow us to ask and answer these conceptual -- and practical -- questions in ways that draw on a variety of disciplines including architecture, history, urban planning, and the urban humanities?

This course offers an interdisciplinary perspective on urban studies, urban design and the ways that concerns around social justice and equity can influence how we think about cities in the past, present and future. Drawing on a range of faculty expertise in LSA and Taubman, this team-taught course also incorporates the voices of practitioners and community members involved in current attempts to revitalize Detroit and “Detroit-like” cities in the United States and elsewhere. By “Detroit-like cities” we mean urban areas that have experienced negative population growth, deindustrialization, economic disinvestment, racial stratification, environmental injustices and concomitant crises in housing, health care, policing, criminalization, and education. At the same time, Detroit and Detroit-like cities offer opportunities to conjoin critical humanistic inquiry, urban design, and policy solutions for building more equitable and sustainable cities.

This course is co-designed and co-taught as part of the Egalitarian Metropolis Project, which is a partnership between the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning and the College of Literature, Science and the Arts. It combines traditional course materials with a team-based orientation to teaching and learning.

The learning goals for this course include an understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities facing Detroit and Detroit-like cities; an appreciation for and knowledge of the ways that the built environment can influence the nature of lived reality; an introduction to the

urban humanities; and the ability to use frameworks of equity and justice in regards to how we think about, plan for, and work towards more egalitarian urban and metropolitan regions. Most centrally this course begins -- and ends -- with the future. Throughout the semester you'll be working to research your own distinctive, creative and well-informed vision of the future of Detroit that embodies the principles of egalitarianism, sustainability and inclusion.

## Assignments

Jan 11: 2-3-paragraph reflection on Detroit Future City video

Jan 27: 750-1000-word paper on the Detroit music scene

Feb 10: *Dawn of Detroit* poster project

Mar 10: Research Project proposal

Apr 19: Final Research Project

## Course Schedule

T. Jan 6: Introduction to Learning Opportunities and Expectations

### Section One: The Future in Detroit

"In Detroit, the future is still being written . . ."

#### Tu. Jan 11: Detroit as a Future City

**Read:** "Detroit: The Most Exciting City in America?," *New York Times*:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/20/travel/detroit-michigan-downtown.html>

Read: "Detroit, New Frontier"

<https://www.shareable.net/detroit-new-frontier/>

Watch: Emimen's Super Bowl Ad 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLD798UrKC8>

**Explore:** Detroit Future City Website: <https://detroitfuturecity.com/>

*"Through the shared vision of the Strategic Framework, Detroit Future City (DFC) is committed to advancing the quality of life for all Detroiters. We will accomplish this in partnership with residents and public and private stakeholders, and through data-driven strategies that promote the advancement of land use and sustainability, and community and economic development." Our Shared Vision, DFC Mission Statement*

**First assignment Reflect & Write:** Take a look at the DFC video, "We Are Detroit Future City," featured on the front page of their website. Reflect on it and then view it again. Following your second viewing do a little writing. What do you notice? How is DFC's vision for the future of

Detroit described -- both verbally and in visual language? See if you can identify 3-5 key themes, ideas, concepts that are being utilized. And see also if you can compare/contrast with images presented in the materials we explored during our class last Thursday. The responses should be roughly 2-3 paragraphs and not more than one and a half pages. Please come prepared to discuss your reflections and observations. **Your written reflection must be uploaded on the class Canvas site.**

## **Section Two: The Future in the Past**

In this section of the course we'll go back in time, to the "dawn" of the city and to some of the key historical moments that have shaped present-day Detroit.

### **Jan. 13 Detroit in Global Perspective, I: Detroit as "capital of the 20<sup>th</sup> century"**

Robert Fishman, "*Motor City, Worker City: Detroit as capital of the twentieth century global labor movement*," chapter-in-progress for a forthcoming book, *Detroit-Moscow-Detroit*. To be posted on Canvas

### **Jan. 18: Detroit in Global Perspective, II: Detroit and the crisis of the American industrial city**

Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, "Rust," (Chapters 4,5, and 6). Strongly recommended for purchase, but also available for downloading from the University of Michigan Library online catalogue.

### **Jan. 20: Detroit in Global Perspective, III: Music: Before and After Motown**

#### **Read, view, and reflect on these episodes of Detroit's place in music history**

"From Hastings Street to the Blue Bird: The Blues and Jazz Traditions in Detroit," Lars Born, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 25(2), Spring, 1986, pp: 257-268 (PDF on Canvas)

"Stompin' at the Greystone: Jazz in Detroit, 1917-1940," Lars Bjorn

<https://www.ipl.org/div/detjazz/Stompin.html>

"Bebop in Detroit: Nights at the Blue Bird Inn," Lars Bjorn and Jim Gallert

<https://www.ipl.org/div/detjazz/Bebop.html>

"The Avant Garde Jazz of Griot Galaxy," Ana Gavrilovska, Metro Times, Jul. 12, 2017

<https://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/the-avant-garde-jazz-of-griot-galaxy/Content?oid=4522588>

“Manufacturing Motown,” Vince Carducci, PopMatters, Jan. 26, 2009  
<https://www.popmatters.com/69384-manufacturing-motown-2496071565.html>

**Bonus watch (recommended not required):** “Standing in Shadows of Motown” documentary, streaming low res on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/306924495>

“Techno City: What is Detroit Techno?” documentary <https://youtu.be/a2gr73FQ9-S>

Proto-Punk and Garage:

The MC5: “Kick Out the Jams” (1970) <https://youtu.be/vfKhvzUdJoM>

The Stooges: “Now I Wanna Be Your Dog” (1969) <https://youtu.be/vwmU343eBu0>

The White Stripes: “The Big Three Killed My Baby” (1999) <https://youtu.be/Jn3n6v-e3-l>

The Dirt Bombs: “Ever Lovin’ Man” (2008) <https://youtu.be/xGRYPVNDnjQ>

**Assignment:** 750-1000-word (+ references) paper on some aspect of the Detroit music and its impact (could be a period, an historic site, a genre, a group, or an individual) Due Jan 31

### **Jan. 25: Dawn of Detroit, I**

For this week’s class we’ll be reading sections of the remarkable book, *The Dawn of Detroit*, by historian Tiya Miles who wrote the book while a member of the U-M faculty. We recommend that you purchase a copy of the book because it's beautifully written and utterly compelling. It should also be available for free for up to 30 days via Proquest’s eBook Central, which can be accessed through the U-M Library system

**Read:** Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (NY: The New Press, 2017), Introduction, Chapters 1, 3, 5 and Conclusion

EBook U-M Library Loan:

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/lib/umichigan/detail.action?docID=5751102>

**This will be the first of four classes based on the Miles book and research into early Detroit slaveowning families. The aim of this section will be to identify those streets mostly in downtown Detroit named for prominent families in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Detroit whom Miles and others have identified as slave owners. At the same time we will identify possible re-naming opportunities drawn from native Americans, ex-slaves and activists in the underground railroad. Since these street-names are widely known, the identification will help to communicate to a wider audience the impact of slavery on early Detroit. Each student will be assigned a family/street to research with the aim of**

**designing posters we can display on a website and perhaps in March attach to (or hold up in front of?) the street signs during a Detroit visit. The posters will direct passers-by to a website where the student research can be accessed.**

Monday, January 31 – Detroit music paper due; upload to Canvas site.

**Tuesday, Feb. 1 –**

Continued discussion of the Miles book and of the underground railroad. Students should be prepared to bring to the discussion what they've learned so far in their Team assignment and what more they would like to know about their assigned person.

**Thursday, Feb. 3**

Communicating by Word and Image. How to reach a wider public with brief but pointed summaries; slogans and images. Please bring to class a sketch on standard paper for a possible poster, which we will discuss and critique.

**Tuesday – Feb. 8**

**POSTPONED** - Trip to Detroit from previous syllabus (hopefully until March).

While working on your posters and website uploads, take some time to watch this remarkable film that will be the basis for much of our work in the following section of the course, "Movement and Migration

***Detroit 48202***

Film can be streamed via the University Library Catalog – search under title - from the Kanopy collection.

Pam Sporn's *Detroit 48202: Conversations Along a Postal Route* explores the rise, demise and contested resurgence of America's "motor city" through a multi-generational choir of voices who reside in mail carrier Wendell Watkins' work route. Archival footage and oral histories convey the impetus behind the African American migration up north to push against the boundaries of racial and economic segregation. The testimonials of Wendell's neighbors and friends shed light on the impacts of redlining and the fight for housing justice, the legacy of industrial and political disinvestment, the fragility of Black home-ownership as impacted by the mortgage and financial crisis, and a confluence of events and failed policies that resulted in Detroit's bankruptcy. Blamed for Detroit's devastation but determined to survive, the resilient community offers creative solutions to re-imagine a more inclusive and equitable city **Thursday, Feb. 10.** Dawn of Detroit assignment due.

Please await specific instructions for uploading to our Canvas site your texts for the proposed "historical markers" and jpegs or pdfs of your posters. The texts should be 600 words maximum and each team can decide whether to submit their posters separately or to combine their poster sketches into one submission.

Meanwhile we will devote the Feb. 10 class session to formulating a research project in the urban humanities which will be the main assignment for the course.

Perhaps the uniqueness of Detroit's cityscape today is not so much abandonment as the hundreds of residential blocks where empty lots and boarded up houses stand next to inhabited and well-maintained houses. The upcoming major section of the course will explore the possibility that these blocks are more than just images of Detroit's decline and depopulation. They are also locales of "Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing," and possible entry-points for homeownership and equity-building for families of color who in other cities would be forced into the lowest rung of exploitative rental housing, if not literal homelessness.

The problem and challenges as we see them is that these precarious homeowners have been ruthlessly exploited in the past by what Keeanga-Yamatta Taylor has called "predatory exclusion:" de facto racial segregation that confined the Black population to the worst housing where they paid more for less. But since the 1960s predatory exclusion has been largely replaced by what Taylor calls "predatory inclusion." That is, Blacks has been allowed to rent or purchase throughout the city – not the suburbs – of Detroit, but under exploitative conditions. These include predatory mortgage lending, unfair property tax assessments, the water crisis, environmental degradation, poor city services, all of which will be discussed in future weeks. And there's the tremendous burden in any case of maintaining an older home.

This class session will (1) preview the main themes of the course as they will be developed in the rest of the semester; and (2) explore the ways in which each student could formulate a research project that would address and deepen these themes.

### **Section III: Searching for NOAH (Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing)**

#### **Feb. 15: From Predatory Exclusion to Predatory Inclusion: historic barriers to the search for NOAH**

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit*, Introduction, Chapters 4 and 5.

**Bonus Watch (not Required, but highly recommended):** Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor public lecture on her book, *Race for Profit* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXwZN\\_jGgFs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXwZN_jGgFs)

*Taylor offers a damning chronicle of the twilight of redlining and the introduction of conventional real estate practices into the Black urban market, uncovering a transition from racist exclusion to predatory inclusion. Widespread access to mortgages across the United States after World War II cemented homeownership as fundamental to conceptions of citizenship and belonging. African Americans had long faced racist obstacles to homeownership, but the social upheaval of the 1960s forced federal government reforms. In the 1970s, new housing policies encouraged*

*African Americans to become homeowners, and these programs generated unprecedented real estate sales in Black urban communities. However, inclusion in the world of urban real estate was fraught with new problems. As new housing policies came into effect, the real estate industry abandoned its aversion to African Americans, especially Black women, precisely because they were more likely to fail to keep up their home payments and slip into foreclosure .*

**Feb 17: Movement & Migration: How the Great Migration ReMade Urban America, I**

Beth Thompkins Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, University of North Carolina, 2012, Chaps 1 & 2. Available online through the University of Michigan Library catalogue

“Black Detroit (1945-1975)” in Steve Babson’s *Working Detroit: The Making of a Union Town*, Wayne State University, 1986, pp. 157-178.] Available online through the University of Michigan library catalogue

**Feb. 22: Redevelopment and Race in Detroit from Black Bottom to Lafayette Park & beyond**

*“Black Bottom suffered more than most areas during the Great Depression, since many of the wage earners worked in the hard-hit auto factories. During World War II, both the economic activity and the physical decay of Black Bottom rapidly increased. In the early 1960s, the City of Detroit conducted an Urban Renewal program to combat what it called “Urban Blight.” The program razed the entire Black Bottom district and replaced it with the Chrysler Freeway and [Lafayette Park](#), a mixed-income development designed by Mies van der Rohe as a model neighborhood combining residential townhouses, apartments and high-rises with commercial areas. Many of the residents relocated to large public housing projects such as the Brewster-Douglass Housing Projects Homes and Jeffries Homes.”* From Encyclopedia of Detroit, Detroit Historical Society: <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/black-bottom-neighborhood>

**Read:** June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, chap. 3  
Available electronically through the University of Michigan Library catalogue.

**Read:** Caroline Constant, *The Modern Architectural Landscape*, chap. 8 Lafayette Park  
Available electronically through the University of Michigan Library catalogue or as a pdf File under “Files” on our Canvas site.

**February 24:** Downtown Detroit from Urban Renewal to GilbertTown

**Read:** Conrad Kickert, *Dream City: creation, destruction, and reinvention in downtown Detroit*. Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

Available electronically through the University of Michigan Library catalogue

**Read:** Richard Feloni, "Dan Gilbert has already bet \$5.6 billion on Detroit's future, but money can't solve his biggest challenge," **Business Insider**

<https://www.businessinsider.com/quicken-loans-dan-gilbert-detroit-2018-8>

### **March 1 and 3: Midsemester Break – No class**

**March 8: Along Tireman Avenue – race and culture along the Detroit color line.** This session would reference in particular the court case Sipes v McGhee (1940s) in which a white family sued a black family, the McGhees, who tried to buy a house on the wrong side of the Tireman Avenue color line. Also, the Blue-Bird Inn on Tireman, symbolic of the strengths that Black culture, in this case jazz, might have brought to both whites and Blacks but was crippled by racial prejudice.

Reading: Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton University Press, 2005), Chapter 8 ("Homeowners Rights: White Resistance and the Rise of Antiliberalism"); Chapter 9 ("United Communities Are Impregnable: Violence and the Color Line"); and the Conclusion.

Available online as an ebook through the UM Library:

<https://www-degruyter-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/princetonup/view/book/9781400851218/10.1515/9781400851218-015.xml>

### **March 10. Searching for NOAH: Follow the money, I**

An examination of predatory lending in Detroit with its implications for foreclosures, "underwater" forced sales, unfair tax assessments and financial speculation that has turned the city from majority owner-occupied to majority renters.

Reading TK

Research Project Proposal Due

**March 15: City Water: A human right?** Providing clean water for all citizens was perhaps the overriding project of 19th century urban governments and the principal means to combat cholera - the Covid-19 of the 19th century - and other epidemic diseases. But, as with other former urban achievements, access to clean water is under threat in Detroit. Can access to clean water become a human right?

**Read:** We the People of Detroit Community Research Collective. *Mapping the Water Crisis* [Pdf under Files](#)

Nina Misuraca Ignaczak. "Detroit Water Shutoffs and a Crisis of Public Health"  
<https://beltmag.com/detroit-water-shutoffs-crisis-public-health-coronavirus/>

**March 17: Follow the Money**

**Consult:** Slide deck under Files

**March 22. Homeownership and the crisis of the Detroit environment**

**READ:** "Struggling to breathe in 48217, Michigan's most toxic ZIP code," MetroTimes:  
<https://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/struggling-to-breathe-in-48217-michigans-most-toxic-zip-code/Content?oid=23542211>

**VIEW:** four-minute video, "Mother," scroll down on Delray Neighborhood Framework Plan site  
<https://detroitenvironmentaljustice.org/delray/>

**VIEW:** 11-minute video on Great Lakes Environmental Justice website, "SouthWest Detroit Environmental Vision"  
<https://greatlakesenvironmentaljustice.wordpress.com/southwest-detroit/>

**March 24: Food Sustainability in Detroit**

**Read:** Series of Short pieces on Malki Yakini and the Detroit Black Food Security Network:

<https://detourdetroit.com/malik-yakini-detroit-black-food-security/>

<https://www.hourdetroit.com/eats-food/malik-yakini-on-combatting-food-insecurity-in-detroits-black-community/>

**Watch:** How Urban Agriculture is Transforming Detroit:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/devita\\_davison\\_how\\_urban\\_agriculture\\_is\\_transforming\\_detroit/reading-list#t-222696](https://www.ted.com/talks/devita_davison_how_urban_agriculture_is_transforming_detroit/reading-list#t-222696)

**Recommended:** Dorceta E. Taylor and Kerry J. Ard, "Food Availability and the Detroit Food Desert."

**Explore:** DBFSN Website: <https://www.dbcfsn.org/>

**March 29 – DIY Detroit.** The strengths and limitations of neighborhood responsibility Kim Kinder, *DIY Detroit* [Introduction, chaps 1, 3, 4, 7, and the conclusion. Available online through the University of Michigan library catalogue.

**March 31 – Zoom guest lecture from Anthony Tung, author of *Preserving the World's Great Cities*. “DIY Havana: a comparative perspective on Detroit’s search for an inclusive recovery.”**

**April 5 – the Fitzgerald Neighborhood and the North End, models for NOAH?**

<https://www.theplatform.city/tag/fitzgerald/> <https://detourdetroit.com/fitzgerald-revitalization-project-detroit/>

**April 7 – possible class visit to Detroit**

**April 12 – session on effective writing and organization for a research project in the urban humanities.**

**April 14 - an egalitarian metropolis? – issues of city/suburb equity**

Myron Orfield, *Detroit Metropolitcs*

Peter Moskowitz, *How To Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood*, Nation Books, 2017, pp. 73-120, “The New Detroit,” “7.2,” and “How the Slate Got Blank.”]

**April 19 – Concluding class: prospects for a 21<sup>st</sup> century egalitarian metropolis  
Research Paper Due.**