

1-1-1982

## Corporate Power and Urban Crisis in Detroit

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### Recommended Citation

Lee, Alfred McClung () "Corporate Power and Urban Crisis in Detroit," *Clinical Sociology Review*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 16.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr/vol1/iss1/16>

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Thanks to essays from Machinist Union president William W. Winpisinger, futurist Theodore J. Gordon, and TV commentator James C. Lehrer, the anthology has vitality, reach, and considerable down-to-earth reasoning. Few clinical sociologists will leave it without enough fresh ideas and new clues to corporate need to think their reading time anything but well-employed.

CORPORATE POWER AND URBAN CRISIS IN DETROIT by Lynda Ann Ewen. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1978.

Reviewer: ALFRED McCLUNG LEE, Visiting Scholar at Drew University; Professor Emeritus at The City University of New York

Ewen started out to write "a 'power structure' analysis" of Detroit, what she now calls "a somewhat sterile exercise in demonstrating 'what is.'" Her experiences in gathering data as a participant observer led her from mere description to diagnosis, and from diagnosis to an analysis of alternative prescriptions for change. She says that it was especially "the political motion of the working class in Detroit that transformed this book." With them, she came "to understand the heat, filth, and danger of the presses and the forges. . . real hunger and the despair of violence against neighbor and violence against oneself."

The result is an outstanding example of clinical macrosociology — "lessons about the capacity of human beings and the necessity of certain alternatives that I would have never grasped in the isolation of academia."

Ewen's concern is for the working class. At the outset, therefore, she attacks "those 'realists' who argue that the benevolence or malevolence of the ruling class is not at issue, for, since the ruling class *has* the power and, they argue, since there will always be a ruling class, one must act realistically and accommodate oneself to the realities of life," a rather typical liberal position among social scientists. As she adds, "The resulting cynicism. . . legitimates the freedom of expression and pluralism of the social institutions." On the contrary, "the working class cynic," as she sees such a person, "*when given a viable alternative*, may actively move to challenge existing power and to struggle for a social redefinition because it is in his class interest to do so."

The diagnostic descriptions that Ewen gives of Detroit as a city and of its ruling class, working class, minorities, ownership and control patterns and families, and working class organizations typify or at least suggest the patterns of struggle going forward throughout this country. Her chapters on social control and planning and on political alternatives are especially insightful.

The chapters on the ruling class portray the striking persistence of some families in dominating positions from the eighteenth century French settlement until the present. As she puts it, "Thus, although the history of Detroit is written as the exploits of *individual* persons, taming the wilderness and making great fortunes, the actual history is the history of *families*." She even provides genealogical charts to indicate interrelationships. Her social-historical approach to the current situation is quite enlightening.

The chapters on the working class and on minorities recount their deprivations, exploitation, and bloody struggles and also their accomplishments in organization and in politicizing themselves. She shows the manners in which working class organizations, including the unions, have been co-opted by the ruling class, but she is not pessimistic about the future. She believes that the threat of authoritarian or fascist tendencies "can bring diverse progressive forces together. . . committed to the struggle to protect the rights of working people. As she says in her concluding chapter, "It is not a question of whether social planning can 'save' Detroit. The question is — save Detroit *for whom?*"

As Ewen concludes:

The resolution to the urban crisis in Detroit is not a resolution that will be prescribed by neutral social scientists . . . . The objective forces of history are not blind forces — they are objective phenomena that can be analyzed and understood. And the working class can use that knowledge to protect its class interests, prevent the brutalization of its finest leadership, reverse the growing trend to fascism, and prepare the road to socialism.

This work is an important contribution to clinical macrosociology. Ewen writes quite clearly even though her book deals with a tremendously complex situation. One does not have to agree with her analyses and conclusions to gain a great deal from reading the book.