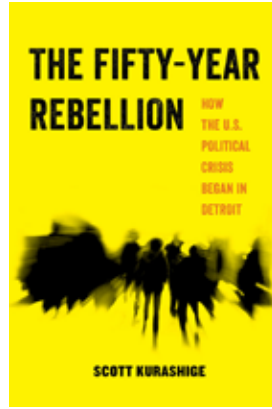


# So Goes the Nation?

*The Fifty Year Rebellion* by Scott Kurashige; University of California Press, 2017



*The Fifty-Year Rebellion* invites us to consider Detroit's recent history as both epitomizing and shaping national trends. But it's not the kind of invitation we've all grown used to.

We've heard the warnings: Detroit is

America's "canary in the coal mine," signaling to the rest of the country how toxic the air is growing. And since the birthplace of the American Dream is now the poster-child of post-industrial decline, we've all heard how, "as goes Detroit, so goes the nation."

These clichés are usually wielded as counsels of despair. Not only do they cast Detroit as a place consumed by doom and gloom, they also strip us all of our agency, conjuring images of an unavoidable spiral into unemployment, neighborhoods ravaged by school closings, water shutoffs, shuttered houses, broken promises and shattered dreams.

Far less common are reminders that Detroit is the home of incalculable collective power—a place brimming with the brilliance of visionary organizers, the seedbed of so many other ways to keep on going on, quietly sowing and growing together.

As Grace Lee Boggs once put it, Detroiters have long been "very conscious of our city as a movement city." In *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, Scott Kurashige skillfully reinvigorates this consciousness, teaching us to think about the overlapping crises of our city, country, and planet from below.

From this vantage point, systematic disinvestment, emergency management, and bankruptcy are all part of a decades-long effort to stamp out the liberatory energies that erupted in '67, and are still pulsing through the city today. These

are reactions born of white fear and feelings of growing irrelevancy on the part of the capitalist class: fear of black political power, of the collective strength of workers, and of the swagger of Detroiters demonstrating more humane ways of surviving and thriving together while capitalism writhes and dies in the background.

Long before the election of Donald Trump—who rode a groundswell of right-wing populism, racism, and xenophobia, promising to "make America great again"—Detroiters were plenty familiar with forced "revitalization" in the name of former greatness.

As Kurashige points out, many key elements that marked the rise of Trump had already facilitated the state takeover, the bankruptcy of Detroit, and the corporate restructuring of the city: voter disenfranchisement, the gutting of workers' rights, the pillaging of public goods and institutions, and authoritarian rule by superwealthy "outsiders" (Snyder as Michigan's Trump).

Kurashige develops three key arguments: first, the "counter-revolution" we are confronting is a reaction to a 50-year rebellion; second, the overlapping political and economic crises confronting us today are a product of the neoliberal turn; and third, despite the immense hardships its peoples have endured, Detroit remains most significant as a city of hope.

There is much to be rejected in the age of emergency managers and gameshow presidents. Nevertheless, Kurashige emphasizes that Detroit's visionary organizers "have moved from the 'rejections' defining the stage of rebellion to the 'projections' necessary to revolutionize the way we live, work, and sustain community." Growing food in vacant lots and producing life's necessities with community-based technologies "can offer the proletariat a new method to own the means of production"—if only the city's devalued lands can be protected and preserved while Detroiters continue "building the social consciousness and relationships necessary to unleash the greatest potential of the post-industrial epoch."

Ultimately, the decades-long battle to redefine and reshape Detroit "provides a window into the epochal conflict between two alternative futures": one characterized by authoritarian rule by the superwealthy, the other by the steady spread of participatory democracy. Insofar as Detroit's most creative organizers are helping to tip the scales towards the more promising of the two futures, it is because they embody "an intercommunal form of localism that seeks to connect with place-based struggles around the globe that refuse to be absorbed into a dehumanizing and unsustainable system."

This is a book to be shared with everyone hoping to keep tipping the scales. It helpfully heals historical amnesia, centers everyday people as creators of change, and moves us next to each other, where we keep turning to turn things around.

Mike Doan is a community-based activist in Detroit where he has lived for five years. He works with Detroiters REsisting Emergency Management, the Detroit Independent Freedom Schools Movement and the Boggs Center To Nurture Community Leadership. He is also a Professor of Philosophy.

## ABOUT THE BACK COVER ARTIST

Ash Arder is a Detroit-based, interdisciplinary artist and designer who creates objects and experiences that investigate and re-imagine the relationship between people and natural environments. This work relies on the cultivation and research of live plants throughout each stage of their lifecycle, including the process and potential of plants to create fiber and other industrial materials. Ash combines personal memories with fictional narratives to create future worlds and scenarios that challenge the way objects are consumed and used.

"Each work depicts stinging nettle in some way. I forage for the plants in Detroit and then hand process them into fiber. Some of these works explore alternative ways of growing the nettle, and others make use of the fiber and/or the byproduct of the fiber-making process."



Cabinet, 2016, Materials: mixed media



Pulp studies, 2016  
Materials: stinging nettle pulp