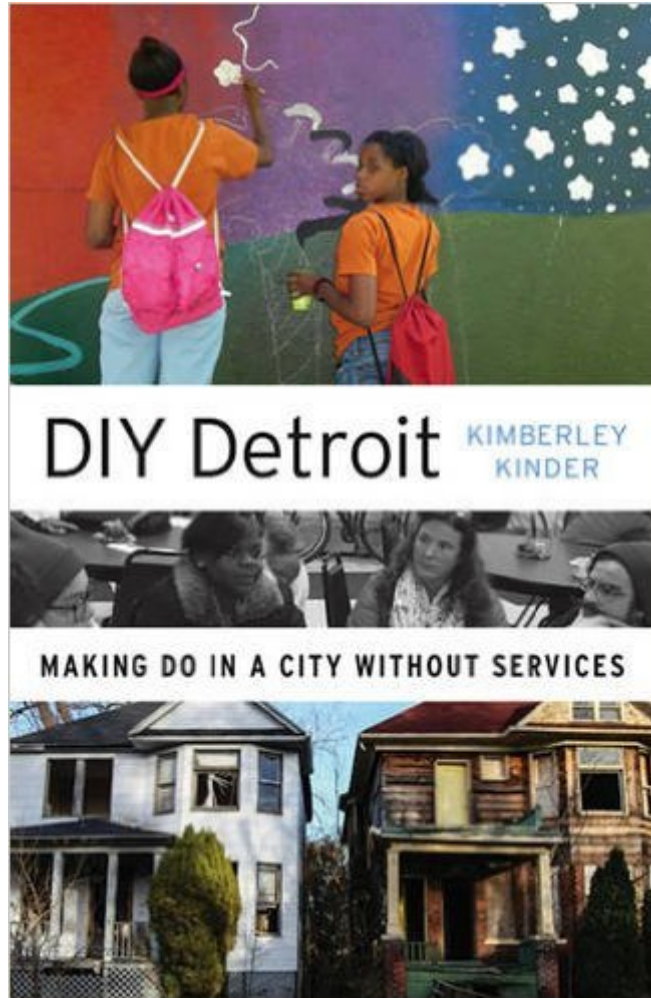


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DIY Detroit: Making Do In A City Without Services



Synopsis

For ten years James Robertson walked the twenty-one-mile round-trip from his Detroit home to his factory job; when his story went viral, it brought him an outpouring of attention and support. But what of Robertson's Detroit neighbors, likewise stuck in a blighted city without services as basic as a bus line? What they're left with, after decades of disinvestment and decline, is DIY urbanism—sweeping their own streets, maintaining public parks, planting community gardens, boarding up empty buildings, even acting as real estate agents and landlords for abandoned homes. DIY Detroit describes a phenomenon that, in our times of austerity measures and market-based governance, has become woefully routine as inhabitants of deteriorating cities—public services in order to get by. The voices that animate this book humanize Detroit's troubles—from a middle-class African American civic activist drawn back by a crisis of conscience; to a young Latina stay-at-home mom who has never left the city and whose husband works in construction; to a European woman with a mixed-race adopted family and a passion for social reform, who introduces a chicken coop, goat shed, and market garden into the neighborhood. These people show firsthand how living with disinvestment means getting organized to manage public works on a neighborhood scale, helping friends and family members solve logistical problems, and promoting creativity, compassion, and self-direction as an alternative to broken dreams and passive lifestyles. Kimberley Kinder reveals how the efforts of these Detroiters and others like them create new urban logics and transform the expectations residents have about their environments. At the same time she cautions against romanticizing such acts, which are, after all, short-term solutions to a deep and spreading social injustice that demands comprehensive change.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kimberley Kinder's book argues that in cash-strapped cities, residents have two options; either they handle their civil needs on their own, or they suffer from the lack of it. Detroit is her main example of a city where the residents are on their own to pick up garbage, maintain abandoned properties, and even to perform law-enforcement duties. The idea of local residents having to handle everything on their own is nothing new. In parts of Vermont, you have to take your trash to the depot yourself, because there's no trash pickup. In order to have public trash collection, the property taxes would have to be raised, which nobody wants. However, Vermont is full of pig farms, and the trash can be fed to pigs, so that offsets the cost. It would not work in a city like New York or Chicago. While services like ambulances and fire departments can be staffed by volunteers, as they are in small towns, it would not be feasible in a large urban area. The chapter "Seeking New Neighbors" has the residents padlocking vacant houses and finding buyers themselves, rather than risk having the place sit empty. The empty house phenomena is one of Detroit's biggest blights, because they obviously attract drug-using squatters. Some banks are open to this, because it saves them having to constantly replace stolen pipes and boilers. Others are not open this idea, and the houses become an eyesore. Though not mentioned in this book, there is a concept called "attractive nuisance," where a property owner can be penalized if his property attracts trespassers. For instance, let's say you own a house with a pool, but you're away for a week at a time, and teens keep sneaking in to use it.

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