



Universidad Sin Fronteras Detroit Campus
Tuesday May 21, 2013
“Detroit Youth, Who?”
note taker Diana Copeland
lecturer Siwatu-Salama Ra

What is Universidad Refresher???

<http://www.unsif.com/>

Detroit Campus. 4th session in a series of 6.

National and International collaboration. Campuses in San Antonio, Puerto Rico, Discussions with organizers in Chicago, DC and others. USF realizes this is a critical time in education. A lot of challenges with education. A lot of movement to try to change public schools into charter. This is our attempt to change the direction in collaboration with our national partners.

Good to go to the USF website to see what is happening in other cities.

National Universidad President Ruben Solis says, “in this day and age to send busy working organizers into our modern day university (which is very racist, classist) is like throwing Christians to the lions.”

The format is very circular and open. Note taking is part of our building knowledge and can be part of the Detroit analysis on that particular topic. Way of giving voice to the community. Instead of individualizing our voices – it collectivizes them. An example of these collective voices was when EMEAC quoted Universidad in a history book of the UU Church. “This is the Detroit Campus’s voice on Gentrification”

There is a tuition of \$200 which helps bring in speakers and assists admin costs. Please give what you can.

Opening Question

“Detroit Youth Who?” is the question for the week. Think about class, race, social economic status of our young people. Who are Detroit youth?

The young people of Detroit is about 2 generations of people. Most people think college age and then younger, the millennial and the alphas. I think they are ignored and exploited and I think the solutions that we need in society are going to be on them. We have too much invested in the status quo. They are youth of color. Everyone call the youth the future but they are our right now. They deserve more space to transform our community.

They represent some of the most vulnerable but the greatest sense of hope for our society and our future.

The youth in Detroit are misrepresented. There is a negative connotation of youth period. A mass of teenagers, a group of teenagers anywhere usually faces negative associations and assumptions. The youth can do a lot more than what people think. I was really listening to everyone else. Detroit Youth Who means no one cares about the youth. It is like rebels without a cause. If they can channel their energy in a new a way they can be awesome.

If we look at Detroit as a chocolate city, as a whole, as a city which still numerically is people of color. Whenever you have a majority of people of color you always have misunderstandings from the mainstream. The youth are the black of the black, the subculture of the subculture. Even the most maligned --they don't have an analysis of the youth. The folks that are not youth have not wrapped their heads around the situation. One group that has tried to wrap their heads around it is corporate media and they are trying very hard to reach them and shape them.

I always find a way to have young folks around me. I really appreciate the honesty and questioning that young folks bring unless they are forced into silence. When the question was first posed I thought of this conversation at 5E Gallery when a young person said "Fuck MLK". There is a disconnect between the youth of today and the civil rights movement.

Youth are the ones that are most affected by politics but have the least amount to say. It was politics when the schools were closed but those were actual people being affected. Having a conversation with my mom we were talking about the ageism is like the most destructive force of any revolution till it is not thinking about intergenerationalism at all. I think the youth are going to be the face of change that is to come.

The world is very different – and evoking the people of the past is not a good way of starting the conversation. It is good is to start talking about where we are now. There is an element of reverse ageism. Mainly directed against young folks. Society takes away the humanity of children if not in the home then in institutions. It takes a lot for folks to find a way to be and connect with those communities.

I think right away of the people that are in the Detroit Public Schools that are almost exclusively Black. At the end of the Educational Achievement Authority, the students at Mumford are getting ready to organize a walk-out. At the end of this first year they are

seeing the assault on their culture and education in this process and the students themselves are getting creative. I think of our conversation as being connected to this process .

When I was a youth I was a rebel but there was always reasons. The youth in my neighborhood I can say they are products of their culture which is a culture of violence. What they are fostered in is a way they act. Most of the youth in my neighborhood are Latino and there seems to be a lot of divisions drawn—Latino vs Black vs White. They are aware of difference. I think they are products of family. When there is family I do see diversity and loyalty in friendship. There is respect if they are given respect. I like what was said that the youth are most affected by policy. They are often on their own – to do their homework – to try to figure out this culture. Often their parents don't speak the language and they have to negotiate by themselves. A lot of places where students get the brunt – that if they don't get certain grades their whole family doesn't get food stamps.

The youth today are not being educated. The schools are closed. It is a deep question. But as a quick statement that is my opinion.

But I think the youth are dealing with so much and trying to stay above water. Where we are today came about in the 70s. A lot of this is because of the fuck ups of the baby boomers. It has taken root in a really interesting way. It has even influenced gang culture. Individual sets from different neighborhoods have replaced collectivity. Youth are resilient in the mess of what they are up against. Despite all the destructions, they might actually have a higher consciousness of what is wrong. The inquisitive nature. They now are like a third eye generation.

Youth are being abandoned and picked up by criminals. Being tapped by bad people for bad reasons. I think it is that they are capturing a lot of that good energy by bad people. How do you talk to people – in the 60s the gangs did change. That actually did change. I can understand political radicalization. I understand that – how do we grapple with the huge amount of criminalization and unemployment.

Youth are our future but I also think about how youth are our present. I worry if the opportunities are open to happen, if youth are allowed to express itself in a way that is healthy and challenges existing structures in a way that is no longer appropriate.

Detroit Youth are black and brown people. They are predominantly working class, they are millennial and alphas. They are the brilliance of YEA and college graduates who will return to the city. The challenge of our day is violence and the pitfalls of capitalism. As an elder in the neighborhood it is not always easy to know how to interact with young people. How they look at me or see me probably has a lot to do with how they have been affected in their life.

When I think of my neighborhood I think of the youth – they want to ask about what is growing in the neighborhood gardens. They are a stronger presence then other age

groups. There is a lot of positive presence. I have learned a lot from youth. I know people's parents because I know the kids.

I think we are the result of a lot of the movements that have come before. The way that we use them is amazing. Whether or not people accept the results of these movements is another thing.

Presentation “Detroit Youth Who” by Siwatu Salama-Ra

First what I wanted to do before starting I wanted to acknowledge the youth and the work that is being done in the city. Foster care system, in the streets, in the military, documented, undocumented everyday – or brothers and sister. Everyone started as a young person, as a baby, into who you are now. I am young person, I am a young adult. In my life and my experience. It was really tough. I had no idea of my purpose or what I was good at. I struggled a lot. I watched my mom struggle a lot. Did not have a father figure. My brother was in and out of prison. As the youngest sibling in our household I had to be the toughest. Who fixed things up and cleaned. And as the baby I thought that I was suppose to be loved on. I saw that was the case with so many of the young people that had to take care of people and take care of siblings.

So Detroit Youth Who really came to my mind quick cause I have been doing work with Detroit Future Youth and we dissect media and perception of youth in the media. One thing that I wanted to get out there is that there is a lot of changes in the city. A lot of new development and new things. I actually do not see anything that is represented for Detroit's young people.

One thing I wanted to acknowledge was the YEA is where are our young people. And where is it being done. The work is happening but is not being documented. Young people all around the world they have been placed inside the schools to be desegregated and that was dangerous. Those are young people that walked out of Western and put their education on the line. I am tired of young people telling me they aren't learning anything. Then that young person becomes labeled, then its the blame on the parents of Detroit. I hear all the time that young people that they have to drop out of school because they have to pay the bills. This is where all of us come in as adult allies to young people.

How do you, or how do you become an adult ally. I don't know. But I would say to continue the work that you are doing. At EMEAC I am learning so much from watching the people here. Language plays a huge role in the relationship between young people and adults. It is so tough trying to reach out to young people, who if their eyes were not blinded, would be onboard. The thing I struggle with is access and language. I try to keep things simple and try not to be a wordist. Some words I don't know what they mean I just know how to use them.

Also wanted to recognize the younger people, this is my niece, she's 8 years old and she goes to GoLightly. In that school you have the 75 freeway. Big freeway. Right next to that you have the incinerator. I have heard stories that they don't like to go outside for

recess because they have an asthma attached – or you hear how young black people are genetically inferior, or how their parents didn't teach them.

What is the cause of that? You get young people that start to believe all the things they hear about themselves. If you have young people that are written off. We need to ask the Questions: Why is this young person dropping out of school, or not getting what they need in the classroom or at home?

Why YEA chose gentrification that they have been doing for the last year. Gentrification inside of Detroit is a hot topic, not just in Detroit but personally. These are actual testimony of them having access denied in their own city. So they can have a creative solution to what is going on. YEA visited the Cass Community Garden. As they get to the garden, they are meet by a pointed locked gate (that said to me – not a community garden). Someone had given them a code so they could go see the garden out. They were stopped at the gate by two Caucasian women – they said “can we help you?”. They put the lock on the inside. They let them know they were an EJ group – and they said they could not do that because they have been witnessing a lot theft. One of the YEA leaders said – what do you mean theft? I thought this was a community garden. First there is this idea is that gardens are going to save the world, and second how young people are being denied access to community spaces.

The other was at the GM building they were followed around the whole time – where were their permission slips, where were their parents. Then at the Majestic Bowling – they moved them from the middle lanes and moved to the end so that young white people could bowl. The mindset was as the chaperone – what does authority look like. What does authority look like – white, male and tall. My first reaction was acceptance – I guess we just can't bowl here, garden here, leave this building. Then it was ‘you know what – that is not right’ – when you challenge situation things turn out your way.

Just want to give thank to YEA who try their best to do what they can when they have a hard situation. To hear “times right now is worse than ever, and that this is on you all”. That is fucked up. I call on elders to just help young people figure out what their purpose is. Some days I feel like I am Neo and I've taken this pill and I have no choice.

Discussion Question

What are the barriers young people face:

Physical barriers – your recounting of the garden story – the gate and the lock and the control of space. Where young people and where young people, black people can be or not be. They are moving the city to be a core, white, young city. The physical barriers get inside us. I make my own barriers. The barriers are put in us. We operate like maybe we shouldn't go in. There is a material, physical gate –then there is a spiritual gate. One of my biggest fears is being in constant pursuit. Not knowing where you want to go and not being heard or seen.

Destruction of the commons.

Not being acknowledged and included.

Seems to be a lot of barriers, barriers between me and young people. Having a place where we can be together that is comfortable. It seems like Universidad is a place where that happens.

Feel something important to the Commons and how I want to be a support.

The underachievement barrier – they tell me that my scores are too high, you have to REALLY be in need.

Just came from the group with Mumford students. There are barriers of them just being physically detained. I am very sympathetic to that. The physical body and spirit and it is the same thing – from what I am observing with young people that are strategizing, the same thing that is making them sit and be – people start thinking, and they start developing. And with a community of kindred spirits. The image of something that is completely contrived. Sometimes you just know it is not for you – but also in case you did not notice that.

The challenge is the internal first. How much of it we internalize first. Like the young people at Mumford, I could not live the way they live but they are still breaking through.

Even though my cousins were born in Detroit they were repatriated and sent back. In order to become insiders, to be able to come in, they could never leave. The idea of that border, for all the people involved, except for the landed gentry, either you are stuck and you can't move or you are in danger of being moved.

What is put out there for us? The youth are highly influenced, generation before us, everything got faster – everything is snap of the finger. Everything is a race. I think one major barrier is the lack of time to achieve. Everything is based on how fast you can do things. We have more distractions – more apps, more cell phones. We have to do things faster and we have things slowing us down.

If you are hurt having to get right back up.

Not having your voice heard.

Have to balance time with living the life of a young person.

Film Showing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8SsV7D62Ro>

The Movie is called – Detroit: The Kids are Coming Back. What is media's story about us, and how can we counteract that narrative? We want to amplify the presence of the youth people at YEA. That may look like shooting our own video, making our media.

While watching the video – who is in the video, what is their vision of the city of Detroit, and what is their profession.

It is a parody right? NO! its not.

Did anyone notice how long people folks have been here. No one in the video more than 2 years.

The media is picking and choosing which youth they want to move the agenda forward. This film is like an advertisement – for like folks in Livonia stuck in mommy’s and daddy’s basement.

What is the “down here” reference? It sounds like we are in a hole.

There is this meme out there that is a manifest Destiny . It is weird. Thank you Siwatu this movie is very telling.

I am seeing a battle of narrative. The brilliance of our high schoolers and our folks on bus stops.

And whose story is worth being told. Some of the comments from the beginning – there are media messages that these youth (white, middle and creative class) are the future of Detroit and then they show a video like this. If the youth are our future what actions are we taking to support the youth that are already Detroit youth?

In Corktown they are putting in these smart lights that also record video – they can hear conversations. Surveillance.

Who is the audience? Maybe someone that came here 3 years ago – but it seems like an immature response. They want to counter the violent narratives.

The untold story of Detroit – what is the true story. Who has come, who has left. Are you all going to do a counter video to this – like to this? (Asked to YEA)

The untold story with the youth in Detroit – like if you are here you are damaged – like the EAA that you are worthless and damaged. This film is like a classic tale of privilege. Whose youth and where are we talking about. Are we talking about the youth in this film? Are these the Detroit Youth?

This idea that it is blank slate – so why is Detroit a blank slate but Gross Point isn’t.?

Some of the folks that were part of the wayne state latino studies program – I am glad they are part of the SW community. It is a tough issue. It is past the point where you are going to reject someone wholly.

There is a hegemony in one sense – there are these videos – and some of my best friends are gentrifiers. So you can see what happened with the DSA – there is removal. “We need to take this school from good to great” And remove the current students when they are done. This is much more harsh. Removal of folks but we are still paying the bill. We need to understand that – esp in education. Its like “its not my fault if I can buy a 30

story bldg. but you can not.” The emergency management came in and removed the protections of the city charter, city council. Illitch would not have been able to buy all that land.

If the youth are our future what actions are we taking to support the youth that are already Detroit youth?

And whose story is worth being told?

I am seeing a battle of narrative. The brilliance of our high schoolers and our folks on bus stops.

You have to engage people. There is a political struggle here. MI is 14% black - we have to make a political statement. Attracted lots of bright young people that are white at Critical Moment magazine. You can't just let folks say messed up stuff – but engage it.

This is beyond not being ghost – this is the mining of our bones. We need to really push back and stand up with out getting killed. We need to explain apartheid to the Afrikaners.

The youth see things in a much more clear state. Want to thank YEA for being leaders for calling the question on youth and land. And affirming your voice and your selves.

Siwatu: We decided to do a video of our own—showing a counter narrative (The Untold Story of Detroit). We shot the video because we wanted to ask the question and see what is the relationship between people and land.

YEA did a video - make a list of questions that are not being asked and then going into their own neighborhood. 7 mile, Fenkell, more to the west that are not being asked anything. In old redford, you had the new Meijer come in, but what is going on? What is the community response? What's really going on in the community?

Final Written questions is:

If you were writing an article that had the opportunity to reach the world and reach the youth of Detroit what would your two most powerful sentences say.