

The Social Crisis in Detroit. On the Verge of an Urban Rebellion

The majority of residents angered by refusal of ruling class to address fundamental issues

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

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Former Detroit Mayor Dave Bing warned local corporate leaders that the city could be on the verge of an urban rebellion.

Speaking at the Detroit Chamber of Commerce policy conference held at the Motor City Casino downtown, Bing said that despite the rhetoric of an economic resurgence, the majority African American population was being left out of key decision making roles.

Bing said conditions were such that the city was just “one incident” away from an explosion similar to events in Ferguson, Missouri or what happened in Detroit in July 1967. The Detroit Rebellion nearly five decades ago was the largest of such outbreaks in the history of the United States.

“As much as we say or think we are being inclusive, the reality is we are not,” said Bing. “There is an undercurrent of frustration and anger that could lead to a negative outcome.” (Deadline Detroit, Feb. 25)

The former Piston’s basketball star, corporate spokesperson and businessman during the 1960s through the present, Bing noted that he had spent several months talking with African-American businesses, students and others in the city. He said many people feel “left out” of the so-called revival of Detroit.

“African-American economic empowerment and neighborhood development must be an essential part of Detroit’s resurgence. Diversity is about counting people. Inclusion is about making people count,” he emphasized.

During the mayoral tenure of Dave Bing the general perception among many people in Detroit was that he was preparing the city for emergency management and restructuring, which occurred under his leadership from 2009-2013. Bing never provided any serious opposition to the imposition of emergency management by Republican Gov. Rick Snyder and the forcing of the city into bankruptcy during 2013-2014, the largest in U.S. municipal history.

Bing’s legacy has been one closely allied with the automotive industry serving as a spokesman for Buick during the late 1960s when the African American liberation struggle was a high level. This was a period when many professional athletes identified with and joined demonstrations against racism and national oppression.

Obviously Bing is echoing certain sections of the ruling class in Detroit who realize that conditions are worsening for the African American people. Growing militancy among the masses has been illustrated through protests against the engineers of emergency management and bankruptcy at three public events in recent months.

Two gala affairs honoring Federal Judge Stephen Rhodes, who presided over the bankruptcy, the Jones Day law firm, which represented the Snyder administration's re-structuring plan in court, and former emergency manager Kevyn Orr, at the Detroit Institute of Arts, saw residents blocking parking lots and confronting guests. A public forum at Wayne State University (WSU) in late 2015 was cancelled due to disruptions by people in the audience who denounced Snyder and Orr.

At WSU, corporate-oriented Mayor Mike Duggan refused to walk onto to the stage amid the demonstration. Duggan is the first white mayor in the city since 1973.

Bing Attacked by Duggan Administration

These statements by Bing were condemned by police chief James Craig who said the former mayor's comments are not true. Craig often says that street crime is down, yet reports abound related to corruption in the Detroit Land Bank Authority known for its no-bid contracts and abusive administrators.

"To make a statement that suggests we are one incident away from Ferguson, Mayor Bing, where have you been?" said Craig. "Have you not watched the transition? I get that it didn't happen on your watch, but it's happening now." (WXYZ, Feb. 26)

Other Duggan appointees joined the chorus against Bing touting their dialogue with African American business owners and residents of the city. The administration of Duggan is known for its intolerance of critical comments about the social situation in Detroit.

Detroit still suffers from widespread poverty, unemployment and home foreclosures. Public transportation is poor and large swaths of the city remain dark where street lights do not work.

Mike Duggan delivered his "State of the City" address on Feb. 23 at Second Ebenezer Church on the city's eastside that has been devastated through job losses and residential flight fostered by the role of the banks and corporations. The speech was met by at least four disruptions from the audience who chanted him down.

Demonstrators gathered outside the entrance of the Church carrying a banner which said: "Duggan=Black Death." When opponents of the Duggan administration attempted to set up a picket line in front of the church doors they were told by police that they had to move to the sidewalk outside because it was "private property."

Some demonstrators challenged this notion since the "State of the City Address" is a public event featuring elected officials. Detroit and corporate interests were sued in 2014 for turning away protesters at a public area downtown.

The City of Detroit in response settled the suit and passed a new ordinance ostensibly designed to protect "free speech." Several Duggan opponents feel that the police action on Feb. 23 violated the law.

Anger Mounts Opposing False Narrative

Recent demonstrations against the ruling class agents of the city have gained the attention of at least a fraction within the power structure. Bing's warning cannot be viewed within a political vacuum.

Citywide elections are scheduled for 2017 and the Duggan administration along with City Council has almost nothing to show for its efforts over the last three years.

Most neighborhood and small business districts in the city remain devastated. Approximately 50,000 homes are facing tax foreclosures after the March 31 deadline.

A Detroit News study during 2015 documented that the banks were responsible for the tens of thousands of abandoned homes and apartments in the city. Many of the report's findings reflect what the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions and Utility Shut-offs has said since 2008.

Successive city and state administrations have failed to stand up to the tyranny of the banks and corporations who continue to loot the municipality of Detroit and Michigan as a whole.

Gov. Snyder has come under fire for his continued emergency management of the Detroit Public Schools. Teachers have engaged in "sick-outs" and other protests against the deplorable conditions prevailing in the schools.

Darnell Earley, the DPS emergency manager appointed by Snyder, stepped down on February 29. Nonetheless, retired Federal Judge Stephen Rhodes, who presided over the bankruptcy theft of retiree pensions, healthcare programs, public assets and massive water shut-offs, has been appointed by Snyder as the new emergency manager over the DPS.

This appointment exposes the fact that Snyder and his backers are committed to maintaining corporate control over the DPS and all other aspects of public life in the city. Efforts by the state-controlled school system to sanction teachers for their protest actions have failed so far within the courts.

Duggan and his allies are proposing a new scheme of control and disempowerment over the DPS through what they call a Detroit Education Commission (DEC). This plan would continue the denial of the right to vote for an empowered school board rendered impotent by the state.

These developments if continued could very well lead to a mass rebellion. Police in the city appear unprepared to address such a possibility considering the broad anger and discontent among the city's nearly 700,000 residents.

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Articles by: **Abayomi**
Azikiwe

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