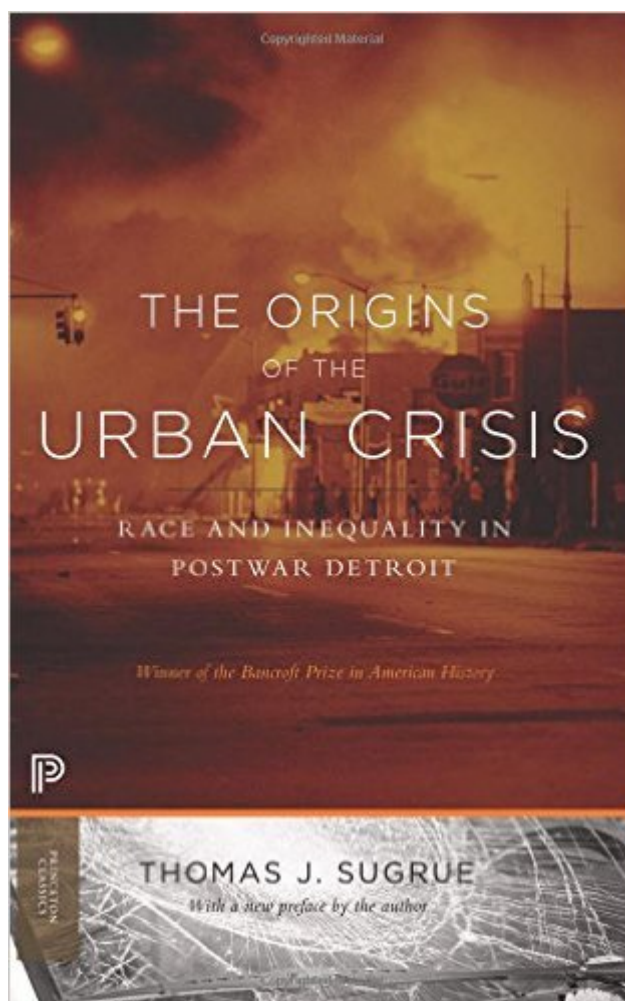


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The Origins Of The Urban Crisis: Race And Inequality In Postwar Detroit (Princeton Classics)



Synopsis

Once America's "arsenal of democracy," Detroit is now the symbol of the American urban crisis. In this reappraisal of America's racial and economic inequalities, Thomas Sugrue asks why Detroit and other industrial cities have become the sites of persistent racialized poverty. He challenges the conventional wisdom that urban decline is the product of the social programs and racial fissures of the 1960s. Weaving together the history of workplaces, unions, civil rights groups, political organizations, and real estate agencies, Sugrue finds the roots of today's urban poverty in a hidden history of racial violence, discrimination, and deindustrialization that reshaped the American urban landscape after World War II. This Princeton Classics edition includes a new preface by Sugrue, discussing the lasting impact of the postwar transformation on urban America and the chronic issues leading to Detroit's bankruptcy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Detroit metropolitan area today is arguably the most racially segregated region in the United States, with a primarily African-American, largely abandoned and dilapidated urban center surrounded by layers of primarily white, affluent suburbs. This book is essential reading for anyone who lives in southeast Michigan as well as other cities that have similar histories of industrialization, urban decline and concentrated poverty such as Cleveland, Gary, Philadelphia, and South Chicago. Thomas Sugrue provides a thoughtful, well-researched, and fascinating analysis of

systematic racial inequality in Detroit during the post World War II automotive industry boom of the 1940s through deindustrialization and "white flight", and ending with the catastrophic race riots of 1967. Sugrue avoids the current, common oversimplifications of blaming Detroit's urban crisis on the '67 riots or Mayor Colman Young by weaving together a complex story of human behaviors, fears, and incentive structures backed by data, references, and personal accounts: "By the time Young was inaugurated, the forces of economic decay and racial animosity were far too powerful for a single elected official to stem." Sugrue's analysis provides insight to understand major groups of stakeholders and their interactions: Workers flocked from the southern states to Detroit seeking relatively high-paying automotive jobs. In the free market, resulting housing shortages allowed landlords to divide properties into tiny apartments and charge premium prices, protecting their investments by being selective in their choice of "low risk" white tenants. Bankers also preferred "low risk" clients, resulting in unequal access to funds.

This is quite a remarkable book. It attempts to explain the riots that occurred in Detroit in the late 1967. These riots were racially based and some of the most brutal in America. The book basically is about racism. It describes the history of racism in Detroit between the 1930's and the 1960's. Unlike other books that tend to be anecdotal this book attempts to look at the mechanics of the process and to provide empirical material to illustrate and validate the material in the text. The story of the book is that racism is a complex phenomenon. Detroit in the 1940's had a vast appetite for labor. This led to it being a city in which Afro Americans could be employed. Large numbers began to migrate and to fill the more lowly paid jobs in the auto industry. The book explains the sorts of mechanisms, which governed this process. How employers would discriminate against blacks, to keep them in lowly paid positions and the fights that some unions engaged in to overcome such practices. The book goes on to explain how housing was one of the main ways in which blacks were able to be limited to certain areas. The widespread use of housing covenants permitted blacks to be excluded from more affluent areas. This meant that blacks became concentrated in small areas which subsequently became ghettos. The action of courts and legislatures to overcome the use of discriminatory covenants was opposed violently. The book shows how populist politicians would ply the race card to gain election at the expense of the more principled. How they would exploit the fear of residents about the alleged nexus between Afro Americans and crime. This in turn led to violence being unleashed on those Afro Americans who were able to afford housing in more affluent areas.

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