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FEATURES » FEBRUARY 17, 2009

## Detroit: City of Hope

Building a sustainable economy out of the ashes of industry.

By [GRACE LEE BOGGS \(/community/profile/7691\)](#)

Detroit is a city of Hope rather than a city of Despair. The thousands of vacant lots and abandoned houses not only provide the space to begin anew but also the incentive to create innovative ways of making our living—ways that nurture our productive, cooperative and caring selves.



Shuttered homes line a downtown Detroit street. An estimated one in three Detroiters lives in poverty, making it the poorest large city in the United States.

The media and pundits keep repeating that today's economic meltdown is the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. But in the '30s, the United States was an overproducing industrial giant, not today's casino economy.

“ Detroit was once the national and international symbol of the miracle of industrialization. It is now the national and international symbol of the devastation of deindustrialization.”

In the last few decades, once-productive Americans have been transformed into consumers, using more and more of the resources of the earth to foster ways of living that are unsustainable and unsatisfying. This way of life has created suburbs that destroy farmland, wetlands and the natural world, as well as pollute the environment.

The new economy also requires a huge military apparatus to secure global resources and to consume materials for itself, at the same time providing enormous riches for arms merchants and for our otherwise failing auto, air and ship-building sectors.

Instead of trying to resurrect or reform a system whose endless pursuit of economic growth has created a nation of material abundance and spiritual poverty—and instead of hoping for a new FDR to save capitalism with New Deal-like programs—we need to build a new kind of economy from the ground up.

That is what I have learned from 55 years of living and struggling in Detroit, the city

APPEARED IN THE FEBRUARY 2009 ISSUE



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