In 1998, 23 years after its original publication, South End Press reissued Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin's *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying, A Study in Urban Revolution*. Georgakas and Surkin's book focuses on black labor radicalism in Detroit from 1967-1974, examining the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the cadre of black revolutionaries that worked at its core. *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* remains one of the few monographs to take black labor radicalism seriously. Having been out of print for a number of years, its republication adds immeasurably to the literature on Black Power, Detroit history, labor history and the history of the Left. At the same time, and perhaps more importantly, the insights offered by the League--and discussed by Georgakas and Surkin--about capitalism, labor organizing, racism, solidarity and working class power remain as urgent and relevant today as they were in the 1970s.

This "updated" edition includes a new forward by Manning Marable, a new preface by the authors and two new chapters at the end of the book. Otherwise, the authors only revised typos and technical mistakes that were in the original. Thus, as Georgakas and Surkin observe, the power of the new edition lies in its preservation of the tone, perspective and tempo of the 1975 study, not in new analyses, or a new historical perspective.

*Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* examines the activities, perspectives and changing formations of the cadre of black revolutionaries that worked at the core of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. It describes their experiences in the League, leading up to the League's formation and proceeding its disillusion. Georgakas and Surkin move back and forth between projects and organizations that members of the League participated in or spearheaded, discussing the relevance of each project to the larger organization and examining the theoretical and political underpinnings of League activities and decisions.

The first project that they examine is the *Inner City Voice* (ICV), a black revolutionary paper inspired by Detroit’s 1967 “rebellion.” Where other underground papers offered readers the kind of yellow journalism that exposed injustice, the authors argue, the ICV provided its audience with an agenda for revolutionary action that was con-
nected to mass political education. At the same time, the ICV used its resources to organize workers. They hosted activist meetings in their offices, maintained contacts and organizers inside plants, and educated workers about the relationship between their struggles and racism in the rest of the city.

Soon after the ICV was established, one member of the informal action/study group that produced the ICV, John Watson, became the editor of the South End, Wayne State University’s daily student newspaper. Watson turned the South End into “the voice of the de facto radical united front” on campus and used the paper itself as an organizing tool for struggles all over the city. Often, Watson sent the majority of the 10,000-copy print run to his comrades to distribute at schools, hospitals or factories.

A number of ICV activists were also key players in the formation of DRUM, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement at the Hamtramck Assembly plant. Organized by black activists in and outside the plant, DRUM confronted Chrysler about unsafe working conditions, mandatory overtime, and racist practices, concerns that the United Auto Workers had channeled into its bureaucratic and ineffective grievance procedure. Thus, at the same time that DRUM activists organized against the company, they also fought against an unresponsive union that prioritized peaceful relations with management over its members’ needs. DRUM was more than just “an angry caucus of rank-and-file workers;” it was an organization that offered black workers a critique of white corporate power at the same time that it confronted management. Further, and perhaps more importantly, DRUM connected black workers’ experiences with racism in the city to their grievances inside of the plant, inspiring black workers to participate in militant action and develop a larger critique of American society.

DRUM’s demands, the authors suggest, were more challenging to the status quo than concerns about guaranteed pensions or annual cost-of-living adjustments—preoccupations of the mainstream union movement. In fact, DRUM was unsatisfied with the “labor peace” the UAW regularly brokered with the Big Three—an implicit agreement that the union would manage the workforce as long as workers received incremental improvements in their wages, benefits and job security. DRUM activists were not interested in managing workers for capitalists. They were interested in revolution.

In May, 1968, in response to a speed-up, 4,000 black and white workers shut down the Hamtramck Assembly Plant in a massive wildcat strike organized by DRUM members. This action was the culmination of months of organizing and also represented the high point of DRUM activity. DRUM’s successes encouraged black workers in other factories to create their own RUM organizations and also inspired the formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, designed to organize and support these dissident black labor organizations.

DRUM activism and the push to establish RUMs in other plants were projects of the in-plant-organizing arm of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. The League was also involved in organizing outside of factories—in schools, neighborhoods, and recreation centers. While some members pushed for the League to focus its energy on in-plant organizing, others saw workplace-based activism as one component of a larger organizing drive toward revolution and worked to expand the League’s support of neighborhood-based organizing.

Georgakas and Surkin clearly take sides in their discussion of the internal politics of the League, suggesting that those members who wanted to broaden the scope of the organization to include non-labor activism had the right idea. By the middle of 1971, the tensions between those members of the League who prioritized in-plant organizing, and those who wanted to broaden the
scope of the organization came to a head and the
League split in two: members of the in-plant-orga-
nizing faction formed the Communist League and
the others created the Black Workers’ Con-
gress.

The book includes many more rich accounts
of League activism, layering a series of interlock-
ing stories in loosely chronological chapters. Ev-
ery so often it is difficult to follow the chain of
events, but this confusion rarely detracts from the
power of the unfolding story. Georgakas and
Surkin tend to focus more attention on the theo-
retical debates and conversations held by League
members then they do discussing the intricacies
of organizing. Sometimes this seems ironic, since
they clearly respect and frequently reiterate the
League's ideological and organizational commit-
ment to activism on the ground. Furthermore, the
authors' prioritization of the theoretical debates
and the most prominent voices means that the
book offers an almost exclusively male picture of
the League. While the authors do criticize the gen-
der politics of the League—pointing out that the
organization never supported strong women lead-
ers—they also reproduce the minimization of
women's roles by focusing exclusively on the
work done by men. In fact, few women are dis-
cussed in the book at all. Those who are men-
tioned are often identified as wives of their ac-
tivist husbands and seldom receive more than a
sentence describing their work.

The authors are also interested in clarifying
the differences between reformism and revolu-
tionary activism and they hold up the League as
their model of a truly revolutionary organization.
They wonder aloud about what defines a revolu-
tionary and about how we, as scholars and ac-
tivists, can tell the difference between reformist
actions that may look similar on the surface but
share few theoretical underpinnings. However,
Georgakas and Surkin's distinctions between re-
formism and revolution remain somewhat un-
clear. For example, they argue that the ICV's "con-
sistent anti-capitalist analysis transformed arti-
cles from simple expressions of grievances capa-
ble of reform to a critique of the entire social or-
der" (17). But, they do not explain how this
worked. At the same time, while their treatment
of this sticky and recurrent question remains
murky, they definitely push the question further
than most historians, raising a series of provoca-
tive issues.

The tone of the original book contrasts
sharply with the two new chapters the authors
added on to the end. The introduction to the first
edition most clearly positions the authors' original
study in mid-1970s radicalism. Their conclusions
that "the capitalist work ethic has been discred-
ited," and that "popular doubt about the ability of
the dominant class to govern effectively has be-
come wide spread" reveal their belief at the time
that mass disillusionment with the contradictions
of capitalism was both probable and imminent
(6). More specifically, their tone suggests that they
saw the militancy of the League of Revolutionary
Black Workers as part of a larger trajectory to-
ward a potentially massive, if as yet unorganized,
working-class revolt. Clearly, the economic and
social transformations that the authors imagined
in the mid-1970s remain unrealized today. Instead
of fragile or tattered, many working class Ameri-
cans see global capitalism as inevitable and over-
powering. Rather than appearing naive, however,
the authors' hopeful tone is a refreshing opti-
mism, derived from their assessment of the pow-
er of grassroots organizing conducted by the
League and predictions about its legacy.

In their second-to-last chapter, "Thirty Years
Later," the authors discuss the current state of
American capitalism, economic injustice and the
legacy of the League. "What should disturb all
Americans," they write, "is that the analysis the
League's founders offered now applies increasing-
ly to the nation as a whole." The tone of this chap-
ter is different than the original study, since the
authors' focus on national trends instead of local
struggles and since their enthusiasm about the possibilities for change has been muted. In this section, Detroit serves as more of a metaphor for urban decline, it is no longer a vibrant city full of the struggle and activism like the one they describe in their book. However, the authors clearly still believe in the power of organizing.

For the final chapter, "The Legacy of DRUM: Four Histories," Georgakas and Surkin invited four Detroiterst to write about their experiences and observations since the heyday of the League. These activists meditate on their relationship to the League and on its legacy, both in their lives and in their city. The inclusion of two women in this group of commentators seems like an effort to correct the male-dominated narrative that the authors presented in their book. Ultimately, the authors give one of their commentators the last word, ending their book with a note of hope: "never before have there been so many Americans who ought to be natural political allies. This is a great time to be a revolutionary."

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