What Detroiters Have to Say about Detroit: How Myths Affect our Perception of a City

Before my final discussion, I would like to address what might seem like an elephant in the room. With all the rhetoric I built up for a project that is supposed to give a taste of reality, I know that it appears contradictory to have only included one African American voice in a city that is 83% black—blacker than any big city in America. Though it is no excuse, my main defense for this is a lack of time. While I had gone into the project very conscious of racial inclusion, as I started to reach out to residents of Detroit, I kept having great interviewing opportunities where the individuals didn't necessarily meet my demographic checklist. Because it would be ludicrous and counter-intuitive to turn away any interviewing opportunity, I just went with the flow and the deadline approached faster and faster.

Even as I am writing this, I still wish that I could have had extra time to converse with more individuals, but at a certain point the dialogue had to end and information had to be compiled. No doubt the opinions in this project would have benefited from at least one more African American voice, especially a male's. I also have no perspective from anyone who lives in Detroit's massive East Side. But where I am lacking in accurate demographic representation, I try make up for in raw diversity. Between the four old and four new residents I have represented European American, Asian American, African American, and Latin American cultures in Detroit. Another thing to keep in mind is that half of my interviewees were new residents to the city. The demographics for that subset of the population are a lot less black.

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So, what can be drawn from all of these perspectives? As I said, the goal of this

exploration was to provide a variety of viewpoints from new and life-long Detroit residents to

develop a richer understanding of the myths I've selected. And sure, some light was shed on

these "myths". In some cases they were confirmed, in others they were torn apart, and in

others yet they were found to be irrelevant. But so what? What does this mean? And why

should you care?

If you are already interested in Detroit, then this information can be interpreted anyway

you like. I am not trying to promote or advance any one particular view, only present resident

dialogue that I found interesting and relevant to the myths. For everyone else, the way myths

affect our perception of reality goes well beyond Detroit, or any kind of experiences with a city.

Myths have a lot to do with the individual differences in the way we think about the world and

interpret our environment. My project represents one example of this. Enrolling in graduate

school at Wayne State and planning to move to Detroit in the next few months, I had a

particular motivation to learn what Detroiters had to say about myths surrounding their city;

especially when so many people are saying things for them. For you, the way myths influence

our perception of something else in history or pop culture might be more relevant.

The way I am using the word, at its core, a myth is simply an exaggeration or

misunderstanding of reality. Because there are very few fundamental truths of "reality" that

humans can agree upon, this definition presents a certain irony. As quoted from the well-

known author George Orwell, "Myths which are believed in tend to come true." If we are never

aware that the way we understand something is a myth, is it really a myth? Has it then "come

true"? Obviously, there is no right answer to this, it's purely philosophical. However, I believe

that if we make a conscious effort to be more aware of alternative viewpoints and to explore

assumptions that might be myths, we will bring ourselves closest to a genuine understanding.