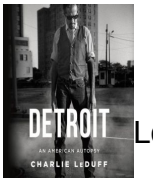
Detroit: An American Autopsy



Leading the news today is the announcement that Detroit filed for bankruptcy. They aren?t the first municipality to file, but they are the largest. What this means for residents, city workers, retirees and the state of Michigan remains to be seen. 20 billion dollars is hard to wrap my mind around, and is a figure without names and faces.

Hoping to personalize this story is native son Charlie LeDuff. His recent nonfiction work is called *Detroit: An American Autopsy* [1]. LeDuff is a journalist who left Detroit at an early age and traveled the world covering international conflicts and won a Pulitzer for his contributions at the New York Times. He returns to Detroit to work for The Detroit News.

This book covers a variety of stories, including the fall of ex-Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, city council corruption, the crumbling auto industry implications, and the struggles of a local fire station. You also meet LeDuff?s family and follow them while they are coping (or not) with living in and near Detroit.

What happens when you return to the city where you were born and raised only to find it crumbling into a mess beyond your imagination? Not unsurprisingly, LeDuff is often unable to always remain the impartial journalist.

LeDuff's voice is full of whiskey and cigarettes and is at times both loving and profane. He prides himself at fulfilling the old school newspaper stereotype. I can see how this cowboy style could put off some readers. But I appreciated that he doesn?t shy away from the stories of sex, drugs, poverty, race, violence, fear and most importantly injustices associated with those things.

Most importantly, LeDuff makes the case that the failure of Detroit isn't just Detroit's problem, nor is it Michigan's problem. This is an American problem and everyone should help shoulder the burden.

Still curious? There are a few other recent nonfiction books about the Motor City including *Detroit City is the Place to Be: the Afterlife of an American Metropolis* [2] by Mark Binelli. For a more specific focus try *Detroit Rock City: the Uncensored History of Rock 'n' roll in America's Loudest City* [3] by Steve Miller or *Sixty to Zero: An Inside Look at the Collapse of General Motors--and the Detroit auto industry* [4] by Alex Taylor.

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Posted by Sarah B. on Jul 19, 2013

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