



Written by [Ralph R. Reiland](#) on August 8, 2013

The Killing of Detroit

In 1960, Detroit had the highest per-capita income in the United States. 

Today, Detroit's median household income is less than half the nationwide median household income, the city's 36 percent poverty rate is triple the national rate, the proportion of children in Detroit living in poverty is 57 percent, more than double the national rate, and roughly half of Detroit's population is illiterate.

In 2011, the National Institute for Literacy reported that 47 percent of the residents of Detroit were "functionally illiterate."

This illiterate half of the city is "not able to fill out basic forms for getting a job, those types of basic everyday things," explained Karen Tyler-Ruiz, Director of the Detroit Regional Workforce Fund.

And it's not getting any better for the next generation coming through Detroit's schools — the public schools with the highest per pupil expenditures in Michigan.

The U.S. Department of Education reported that "only 7 percent of the eighth graders are grade-level proficient in reading and only 4 percent are grade-level proficient in math" in Detroit's public schools, reports Terence P. Jeffrey at CNSNews.com.

"I don't know how they get by, but they do," stated Tyler-Ruiz, referring to Detroit's illiterates.

How they "get by" isn't much of a mystery. "There are 264,209 households in Detroit and 91,204 of them — or 34.5 percent — get food stamps," reports Jeffrey.

"A tour of Motown's mean streets should be a regular feature for policymakers because Detroit is a monument to 45 years of failed liberal urban policy," writes Henry Payne, editorial writer at the *Detroit News*. "Beyond the city's downtown square mile of corporate headquarters and sports stadiums, the tour would reveal Detroit's apocalyptic, 137 square miles of abandoned buildings, empty lots, and violence-torn neighborhoods."

The "liberal dream" of aggressive anti-poverty urban policy has turned into a "Detroit nightmare," contends Payne.

"America has suffocated Detroit with compassion, pouring billions of dollars beginning with Lyndon Johnson's Model Cities Program in 1966," argues Payne. "Trouble is, the liberal medicine turned to poison. Welfare assistance such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children ripped apart families," providing "perverse incentives for father and mother to stay unmarried. Today, 80 percent of Detroit children grow up without a father — up from 25 percent in 1960 before Washington's welfare largess."

In effect, Aid for Dependent Children became Aid for Making Children Dependent on Government.

This collapse of the family as the basic child-raising institution has produced "a void that breeds every city pathology," maintains Payne. "Without fathers as role models, young boys drift into the city's 47 percent illiterate class. According to academic research, over 50 percent of black men in Detroit are high-school dropouts, 72 percent of them jobless, 60 percent have done prison time. In 1966 the murder rate stood at 13 per 100,000 residents. By 1976 it had climbed to 51 per 100,000 and has hovered there since."

Detroit's population has collapsed from 1,849,568 in 1950 to 701,475 in 2012. "Traditional two-parent



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families and the productive taxpaying citizens they produce have fled,” says Jeffrey.

Wrote Joan Didion in her 1979 book, *The White Album*, “In the years I am writing about I was living in a large house in a part of Hollywood that had once been expensive and was now described by one of my acquaintances as a ‘senseless-killing neighborhood.’”

Payne recommends an “Urban Policy Reality Tour” through Detroit’s senseless-killing neighborhoods. “Michigan politicians should take it,” he says. “President Obama should take it.”

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