

Fighting for Water in Detroit

Images of the Activist Response to Injustice

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(Photo: Joshua Lott/Getty Images, 2014)

Despite the essentialness of water, many Detroit residents historically and currently live without supplied water due to their inability to pay their water bills. In July of 2014 alone, around 15,000 residents lost their water service.¹ These shutoffs have only increased, exposing citizens to months without water in the state nicknamed the “Great Lakes State.” In the following images, you will see how the people responded to this injustice, fighting for their right to water – from 2014 to the present.

¹ Chapman, M. M. (2014, July 26). Detroit shuts off water to residents but not to businesses who owe millions. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailybeast.com/detroit-shuts-off-water-to-residents-but-not-to-businesses-who-owe-millions>



(Photo: Anthony Lanzilote/The Detroit News, 2019)

Much of Detroit's fight for water looks like this: people speaking out in public. Many demonstrations like this particular image stress the essentiality of water. The message that many activists express is that the shutoff of water in Detroit homes is a violation of the human right to water. Therefore, messages like the one in this image are highly common in demonstrations.



(Photo: Rebecca Cook/Reuters, 2014)



(Photo: Joshua Lott/Getty Images, 2014)



(Photo: Maya Rotem, 2015)

With the lead contamination crisis in Flint, the two Michigan cities have come together to seek justice for their communities that have been overlooked by the state government. Many of these efforts include marching on Detroit demanding water assistance for its residents. In both of these cities, poor residents as well as African American residents have been disproportionately impacted. This has bonded the cities together in solidarity, and the never ending struggle for equality and clean, affordable water.



(Photo: Erik McGregor/Getty Images, 2017)



(Photo: Derrick Broze, 2015)

One of the activist groups in Detroit is the Detroit Water Brigade. In this image, see Demeeko Williams of the Detroit Water Brigade talk during a rally outside the federal courthouse in Detroit in 2014. Groups like the Detroit Water Brigade work to help those in need. The crisis in Detroit affects those living in poverty much more than any other community. They have been, in many ways, abandoned by the government – or even obstructed by the government – so they fight for their own justice.



(Photo: Justin Wedes, 2014)



(Photo: Justin Onwenu, 2020)

Part of the effort to help those without water includes bringing bottled water to specified drop off locations. This is the only way that many residents in Detroit can get water for their daily needs.



(Photo: Paul Sancya/AP, 2020)

Even though Governor Whitmer announced that water shutoffs would be suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic, some residents still do not have water. Thus, they cannot wash their hands at home because they do not have access to running water. But the pandemic does not halt volunteers from helping their community, wearing masks and gloves to still ensure the natural human right to water.



(Photo: Jose, Juarez, 2018)

Monica Lewis Patrick, president of We the People of Detroit, is one of the strongest voices in the fight for justice. The efforts of We The People of Detroit and other activist groups flip the narrative of the poor, inept victim. They partner with those who have been affected by these crises (not only in Detroit but in cities such as Flint as well) to provide relief and aid to those in desperate need of it. These groups have set a great example of the many ways that these communities can be reached – examples that will have to be taken more seriously as water becomes less and less affordable in the United States.



(Photo: Rasheed Shabazz, 2014)



(Photo: AP Photo, 2015)

From the strength and determination of the activism in Detroit shown by the length of their struggle, it is easy to tell that this community is one that will never be silenced. They will fight for each other, help each other, stand with each other, and support each other until every resident of Detroit, no matter their income or the color of their skin, will have the right to water – and have that right safeguarded.



(Photo: Phil Pugliano/Getty Images, 2020)