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Now Is the Time!: Detroit Black Politics and Grassroots Activism

Todd C. Shaw

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In *Now Is the Time!* Todd C. Shaw delves into the political strategies of post–Civil Rights Movement African American activists in Detroit, Michigan, to discover the conditions for effective social activism. Analyzing a wide range of grassroots community-housing initiatives intended to revitalize Detroit's failing urban center and aid its impoverished population, he investigates why certain collective actions have far-reaching effects while others fail to yield positive results. What emerges is EBAM (Effective Black Activism Model), Shaw's detailed political model that illuminates crucial elements of successful grassroots activism, such as strong alliances, strategic advantages, and adaptive techniques.

Shaw uses the tools of social movement analysis, including the quantitative analysis of budgets, electoral data, and housing statistics, as well as historical research and personal interviews, to better understand the dilemmas, innovations, and dynamics of grassroots activism. He begins with a history of discriminatory housing practices and racial divisions that deeply affected Detroit following the Second World War and set the stage for the election of the city's first black mayor, Coleman Young. By emphasizing downtown redevelopment, Mayor Young's administration often collided with low-income housing advocates. Only through grassroots activism were those advocates able to delay or derail governmental efforts to demolish low-income housing in order to make way for more upscale development. Shaw then looks at present-day public housing activism, assessing the mixed success of the nationally sponsored HOPE VI project aimed at fostering home ownership in low-income areas. Descriptive and prescriptive, *Now Is the Time!* traces the complicated legacy of community activism to illuminate what is required for grassroots activists to be effective in demanding public accountability to poor and marginalized citizens.

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