

James Boggs: Community Building: An Idea Whose Time Has Come

“Community Building: An Idea Whose Time Has Come” is a speech delivered on April 5, 1987, in Detroit to an African American Leadership Conference titled “Return to the Source II,” a follow-up to a conference two years prior during which he gave a “State of the Nation Address.”



GRACE LEE BOGGS AND JAMES BOGGS, IN AN UNDATED PHOTO. LEELEE FILMS.

“That is why the main question before us is “How can we become new men and new women?” willing to accept the challenge to live by the vision of another culture, a new culture we still have to create, a culture based on social responsibility and respect for one another instead of individualism and materialism and on a love for and kinship with the land and with Nature, instead of viewing Nature as something to be conquered and land as a commodity to be owned? How do we create a culture that is life affirming rather than life destroying, which is based on caring and compassion rather than on the philosophy of the “survival of the fittest” ?

In order to create this new life affirming culture, our first priority must be the rebuilding or

the regeneration of our communities because it is in community that human beings have always found their personhood or their human identity as persons. You can't find your human identity out there by yourself. It is in the community that our human identity is created because it is in the community that love, respect, and responsibility for one another are nurtured. At the present time our human identities are being destroyed mainly because our communities are destroyed by the relentless economic development of capitalist culture. Up to now we have depended upon the corporations to create communities for us — in the sense that we came to wherever the corporations had built their factories or their mines and raised our families to meet the needs of the company. Up to now we have not depended upon ourselves to build community. But now that the corporations are abandoning and destroying our communities, it is up to us to build the community. That means we need a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, we must resist the efforts of the corporations to destroy our communities by closing down our places of work and of the urban planners who are working for the mayor to turn Detroit into a tourist center and develop the river front to lure back those folks who have abandoned the city. (One day we will have to deal with Coleman Young. Don't be fooled by the black face because race isn't good enough. You need something else besides skin color.) But at the same time we must be building the communities necessary for the human identity of ourselves and our children.

What I am talking about is what the Chinese call "walking on two legs" and Cabral called "building as we fight." This is very difficult to do. It is much easier to focus your energy on the external enemy — even though meanwhile we are losing something inside. It is especially difficult now because we are so fragmented."

Find the full piece by James Boggs [here](#).