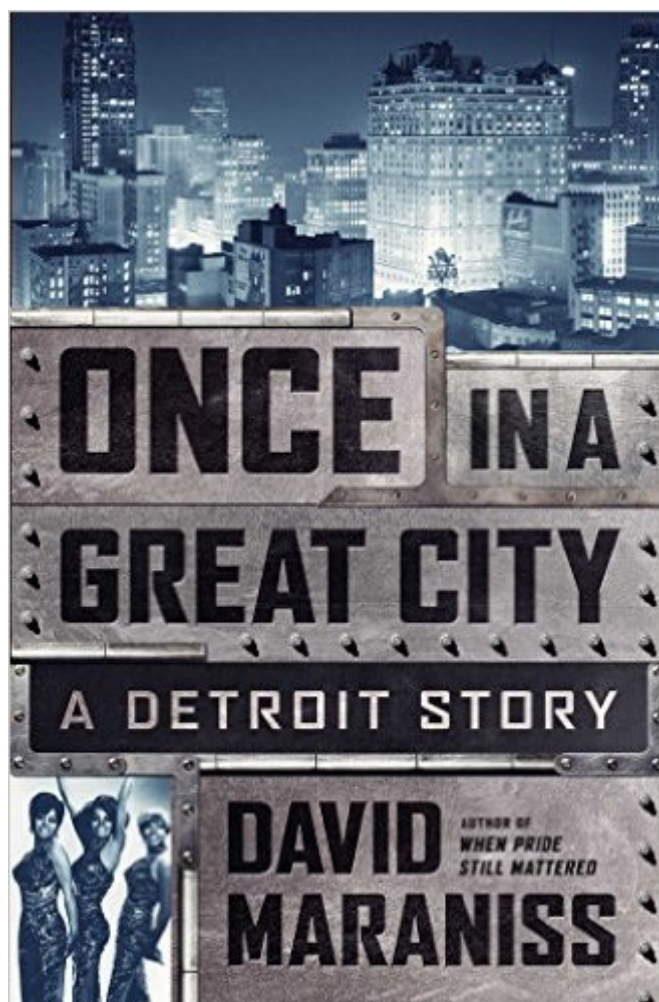


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Once In A Great City: A Detroit Story



Synopsis

* Winner - Robert F. Kennedy Book Award (2016) * "Elegiac and richly detailed...[Maraniss] succeeds with authoritative, adrenaline-laced flair...evocative." "Michiko Kakutani for The New York Times As David Maraniss captures it with power and affection, Detroit summed up America's path to music and prosperity that was already past history. It's 1963 and Detroit is on top of the world. The city's leaders are among the most visionary in America: Grandson of the first Ford; Henry Ford II; influential labor leader Walter Reuther; Motown's founder Berry Gordy; the Reverend C.L. Franklin and his daughter, the amazing Aretha; Governor George Romney, Mormon and Civil Rights advocate; super car salesman Lee Iacocca; Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, a Kennedy acolyte; Police Commissioner George Edwards; Martin Luther King. It was the American auto makers' best year; the revolution in music and politics was underway. Reuther's UAW had helped lift the middle class. The time was full of promise. The auto industry was selling more cars than ever before and inventing the Mustang. Motown was capturing the world with its amazing artists. The progressive labor movement was rooted in Detroit with the UAW. Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech there two months before he made it famous in the Washington march. Once in a Great City shows that the shadows of collapse were evident even then. Before the devastating riot. Before the decades of civic corruption and neglect, and white flight. Before people trotted out the grab bag of rust belt infirmities "from harsh weather to high labor costs" and competition from abroad to explain Detroit's collapse, one could see the signs of a city's ruin. Detroit at its peak was threatened by its own design. It was being abandoned by the new world. Yet so much of what Detroit gave America lasts.

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Customer Reviews

"Detroit". No American city, or perhaps even an international city to some lesser extent, invokes, excites or incites an opinion as much as Detroit, Michigan. It was a city that was truly deserving to be called "Great" as David Maraniss explains in his fabulous account of Detroit during perhaps its headiest years. I think I should know; I am the eldest son of Jerome P. Cavanagh, the Mayor of Detroit from 1962-1970 whose first two years coincided with Mr. Maraniss's time period. I lived at the epicenter of this beautiful city, met and even to some extent, knew all of the major characters Mr. Maraniss writes about, President Kennedy, President Johnson, Walter Reuther, Barry Gordy, The Supremes, Commissioner George Edwards, Michigan Governors John B. Swainson and his successor, Governor George Romney (Mitt's father), most of the minor characters and even just the "characters". I spent much time at my father's office, became friends with all of his important staffers, attended many functions, celebrations, parades, gatherings, openings (they were almost ALL openings) and traveled with my father around the country to Mayoral conventions and other gatherings of like-minded and elected officials, their families and those involved in their cities. I heard it all and saw it all right at the source. My father never hesitated in making his older children a witness to and a part of these gatherings and these events; he thought them a good experience for us, and they were. The absolute best! We lived for those times and the people who made them happen in Detroit. I was with my father at the Rotunda a week before it burned. I was in the lobby of the Sheraton Cadillac Hotel in Detroit in October 1962, where following a meeting my father had with President Kennedy upstairs in the Presidential suite, the President and my father came downstairs. My father noticed me there in the lobby and had the President come over meet me and shake my hand. Headly times! Dad had only been Mayor of Detroit for 10 months and already he'd become close to President Kennedy. I watched Dad help orchestrate Detroit's pitch to win its selection by President Kennedy through the US Olympic Committee to represent the United States as its host city for the 1968 Olympics. There was magic in the air. In short, while everyone has their opinions, I was a living witness to Detroit's greatness so ably captured in Mr. Maraniss's book. I was old enough to know and understand, but most of all FEEL the greatness of Detroit. Everyone I knew felt the same way. We could feel it changing for the better almost every day. And yes, I saw it change almost overnight during the 1967 riots (and yes, they were riots). I watched my father's heart break at the crushing blow to the city he deeply loved and cared about. In a few days time, those disturbances seemingly wiped out all the progress and the immensely successful and

renowned work he and many others did to make Detroit a "Model City". And yet as Mr. Maraniss says so insightfully, all of the writing was on the wall. Detroit's trend downwards was ever so subtle yet it had begun 10 years before the time period he chose to write about. While it was not evident to anyone but the scholar at the time, some of the bricks in the Detroit's foundation were beginning to come out. After all, why was the city selected as a "Model City", the subject of a President's grand vision for revitalized urban life and the recipient of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funds to accomplish that unless there is/was some inherent decay already in existence. Money certainly wasn't what the sick patient needed. To me, it is obvious that Mr. Maraniss wrote about a city that had meant something to him in one way as a native son and as another as an expatriate and adult, able to have stepped aside and seen the larger picture. And yet, while his book can be viewed as a harbinger or lesson for others to live by, it can also be viewed as a city that has not and will not die. I think of his portrayal of Detroit during this time as similar to Florence during the Renaissance when from all corners appear the most diverse and singular men and women, injecting their lives into and placing their stamp upon a local place, its results being long-lasting and with far-reaching effects. We are still seeing those effects in many, many examples today. And GREAT cities don't just go away. And it is unfair to say that Detroit was this or was that, as if the past is the only definition of a living thing. Everything changes. We are here to learn from the past. No, Detroit is not what it was when I was the son of the Mayor but it is still alive and getting better all the time with the same solid commitment and determination from its citizens as it has had at any other time. The methodology might be different but the purpose is still the same. Its greatness is what keeps people's hands in the mix; the effort to preserve what can be preserved, restore what can be restored and build what can be built. Do I miss the old Detroit of David Maraniss's book? Of course. And even more so after reading his exquisitely researched, exhaustive character studies and incredibly loving and entertaining book that captures two of the most ground-shaking years of 20th century Detroit. Ideally, an author writes about what he or she loves. Once completed, the books or poems become their children. Personally, I felt much his personal involvement and even love behind Mr. Maraniss's story. This gives the book part of its vitality. His zeal for his subject is evident and his unmatched skills as a writer and story teller have helped propel Detroit back into the chatter. No bad can come of this. Cities once "GREAT" never die. Yes, they get a lot of symbolic dirt thrown over their prematurely buried caskets and people want to hang the crepe LONG before the ceremony has begun. But as Detroit did not see its transition from GREAT to deeply troubled occur in weeks, months or a few years, so it will not see its current rebirth occur in one fell swoop. Change is only noticeable to those who have a perch on a high vantage point and years to have passed by from

which to assess. Ah yes, then, the less scholarly Monday Morning Quarterbacking begins by people who in most cases were not even involved, present or even alive. The image of Detroit excites this behavior like no other city in the United States does. But as long as the chatter is going, the City is alive. Having been provided with an urban blueprint such as David Maraniss gives us, we should take all the good in it and throw away the bad. To use a metaphor, Maraniss's outstanding research and writing has provided us with the cliff notes. He's done the heavy lifting for us. Florence is great, yet its impact ended over 400 years ago. Rome is still great, although it fell in the 500's. Athens is another example. There are many more. Like those "dead" cities, they are still great. And whether one can compare any or all of this fact to Detroit, Mr. Maraniss's powerful rendering of its amazing history in these monumental years between 1962-1964, make me feel that no other city has a past more enviable than Detroit's. It is Detroit's GREAT past that serves as a major component of its present success. As in years gone by Detroit the former "Model City", can and is using the lessons from the past to create something unique again-something unique as the years from 1962-1964 were. We have David Maraniss to thank for clearing our vision so as not to step into the same holes again. We have been reminded of our storied past and been provided with the trajectory. It is up to us. Maraniss has given us a wonderful romp and yet where necessary, a harsh (it's for your own good) bed-side script that we can efficaciously use with respect to Detroit or any other ailing city.

It is not always obvious today, but for many years, Detroit was a vibrant city, and a major part of the Great Lakes manufacturing belt. It was a key part of America's economy, and drove more than its share of popular culture. David Maraniss examines this time period, roughly from WWII through the mid-1960's.=== The Good Stuff === * The author captures a comprehensive view of Detroit. He concentrates on the auto and music industries, and incorporates much of the culture and lifestyles of the area. The book delves into the racial tensions, both in the country as a whole and Detroit in particular, and catalogs both the successes and tragedies. * Parts of the book are excellent. The discussion of Berry Gordy and Motown Records was excellent and I wish the author would break it out as a separate book and cover more of the details. The efforts of Berry and his sisters in starting and guiding Motown through the minefield of 1960's America were incredible to read. * Maraniss captures very interesting sides to Detroit's history. We see how race relations went through cycles- from relatively peaceful periods of civil-rights progress to more stormy eras of violence and riots. The book stops short of the 1967 riots, but certainly develops the conflicts and tensions that would later explode. * The best part of the book was the

integration of various threads in Detroit. For example, the civil rights struggle crashed into the effort to bring the Olympics to Detroit, and the Olympic bid became a target for disgruntled citizens. The author also incorporates the politics of the UAW and national political parties into the civil-rights movement, and points out how these events affected each other. * Similarly, the author is able to capture events outside of Detroit, but which had an importance to the city. For example, we see LBJ attempting to placate Walter Reuther (the UAW leader) by supporting his plan to build small cars in Detroit. Reuther envisioned a joint venture between the Big 3 to bring one vehicle to a market that would not support multiple entries. We see LBJ at the pinnacle of his power; He wants to strong-arm the Defense Department to buy 100,000 of "these little things"; He exerts pressure on the DOJ to play along and avoid anti-trust issues. All of this was in an effort to win favor with Reuther, whose voters LBJ relied upon for support. Ironically, LBJ hated small cars, and rode around in quite literally the largest car Ford built.=== The Not-So-Good Stuff* Maraniss can get bogged down in details, some of which do not seem to add much to the story. For example, I really have no interest in the Gotham Hotel room number where Goose Tatum (of the Harlem Globetrotters) stayed. It was 603 if anyone is interested BB King got married in 609. * My biggest complaint is the book highlights some areas for thought, but doesn't provide enough guidance. For example, the book described in detail the effort of Detroit to host the 1964 Olympics, a bid that was ultimately unsuccessful. The process by which Detroit sold itself to the International Olympic Committee was described, and it showed up the best and worst of Detroit's civic pride and its internal tensions. The author taunts us with the possibility that Detroit's future might have been very different if it had secured the 1964 Olympics but does not elaborate.=== Summary ===There is a lot to like in this book, and I gained insight into the US in the 1960s. The sections on Motown were fascinating, as were the politics of auto manufacturers, unions and US presidents. The book ends abruptly before the violence of the late 1960s and the anti-war demonstrations, which I wish had been included, but I can see the author's point about limiting the scope. I would have liked to see more analysis, but enjoyed reading the book. I'd recommend it to anyone with an interest in this aspect of US history.=== Disclaimer ===I was able to read an advance copy through the courtesy of the publisher and NetGalley.

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