



# Lights Out at Northern: A Detroit Teacher's Diary

*Perry Munson*

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The opening of the story vividly follows the author's relocation to Detroit, Michigan from Seattle, Washington. Munson crosses the plains in his Volvo, pulling his sailboat to his new home in Grosse Pointe, Michigan. He, a teacher, is moving there because his wife, a pathologist has found a new job at Detroit Medical Center. As he drives he reflects on the land he crosses and the experiences he had in school in rural South Dakota and how it shaped his outlook. As he drives, he has great doubts about moving to Michigan and questions his future there. Yet, he is on the road with no way to turn back. Finally, he arrives in Detroit, entering the rustbelt city that looks like a new planet to him -- poverty stricken, destroyed and hopeless. The scene shifts to his experiences while moving in and getting settled and the adjustments he has to make to live in a large, crime-ridden Midwestern city. After a discouraging job hunt he is suddenly employed by Detroit Public Schools as a chemistry teacher and enters the classroom. The experience is so incredibly different than anything else that he has previously seen in education that he decides to start keeping a diary of relevant day-to-day activities. Months lead to years and he describes the dynamics of teaching in a inner-city school. Corruption, abysmal administrative incompetence and even great, but not-to-numerous, educational triumphs go down in print. His journal is that of an observer from the outside looking in. The diary becomes the stream of consciousness of a hard-working, dedicated teacher who is tormented by what he sees and cannot change. There are successes, but the climb is constantly uphill due to administrative bungling, a pathetic lack of supplies and low expectations placed on students by the system. As the years go by, the school is engifted with a huge grant from the Kellogg Foundation. It is supposed to reform the school and result in a "turn-around" that never happens. Funds disappear, not very much app

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