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Turning the City Inside Out
Shifting Demographics in American Cities

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Turning the City Inside Out
Shifting Demographics in American Cities

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Report

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Abstract

Turning the City Inside Out Shifting Demographics in American Cities

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Narratives around many of America's inner-city neighborhoods have changed significantly in the past decade. Once portrayed by the media and pop-culture as blighted, dangerous areas to be avoided, these neighborhoods have become hip epicenters of a new philosophy in urban planning-- "place-making," a concept popularized by economist and urbanist Richard Florida. Place-making claims to be a kinder, friendlier kind of urban renewal emphasizing tolerance and diversity-- but is this the case?

Through both physical changes and city-lead branding efforts, place-making seeks to draw young professionals, specifically those in the rising "creative class," to inner city areas in hopes these young workers will in turn draw employers. Unlike past gentrification, which often happened through the actions of private developers, these redevelopment efforts often entail municipal or quasi-municipal and corporate intervention in the guise of non-profit redevelopment companies, whose mission is not just to build a few profitable buildings, but to change the entire face and meaning of a neighborhood.

More than a decade into the place-making project, planners and developers have successfully shifted narratives surrounding neighborhoods as different as Austin's east side and Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine and drawn a new population of mostly young, highly educated, and upper middle class residents. But in doing so, these efforts have created huge economic divides and displaced long term residents.

Using Cincinnati and Austin as case studies, this report tells the story of this shift from these residents' point of view, as well as gain insight from the young professionals moving in to the area. While doing so, I will also delve into the blight narratives that lead to place-making in the first place-- charting the change in news media and pop culture from the "urban blight" era to today, comparing residents' perceptions with news coverage to uncover the long-term, hidden vibrancy in neighborhood ignored by both the media and contemporary developers engaging in place-making projects.

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Turning the City Inside Out

The last decade has seen the beginning of the urban America's most dramatic demographic shift in the past 50 years, making city centers across the country increasingly popular, wealthier, and whiter. Responding to this trend, developers in cities large and small have worked feverishly to rebrand "troubled" inner city neighborhoods as hip enclaves of creativity. Meanwhile, long term low-income, minority residents find themselves pushed to the outside.

Section 1: Repainting Urban America

In August, 2010, the only things left standing in the way of an ambitious \$48 million renovation of Cincinnati's Washington Park were the bodies.

The first of the remains that emerged from under the park's green grass was a tiny bone from a person's hand. Behind police tape and orange barricades, archeologists combed the park's eight acres, eventually finding bones from at least 15 people. Before this park in Cincinnati's historic Over the Rhine (OTR) neighborhood could be reborn, the human remains had to be removed.

The city and the Cincinnati Central City Development Corporation (3CDC), the developers renovating the park, had expected this. Over a century and a half ago, the park had been the site of at least four church cemeteries and burial grounds for the indigent. This had been the outskirts of the city, a place to bury those who could not afford to be laid to rest elsewhere.

The county coroner, Dr. O'dell Owens, confirmed that the bones were not from any old murder cases. Then the remains were moved to cemeteries far from downtown and the two-year-long renovation of the park -- which some claim has been overrun with drugs and the homeless -- could begin in earnest.

The project would radically transform a place that had once been a gathering spot for basketball players, summertime swimmers, neighborhood characters, drug dealers and elderly OTR residents out for walks.

For a long stretch, the area simply existed as a gated, gaping hole. Making the project more dramatic was a two-story pile of dirt accumulating in a nearby empty lot, a sort of measuring stick for the renovation's progress.

When the project was finished in June 2012, a new playground, lit fountains, and a dog park replaced some of the park's trees and benches. A subterranean parking garage occupied the space once reserved for the graves, though, in a nod to the history, three grave markers that had once stood in the former cemetery a century ago were placed back in the park. They stand on the south side of the dog park. The basketball courts and swimming pool are gone.

Matt Scott, 25, lived in OTR for four years, including during the renovations of the park. An architecture and city planning student at Miami University at the time, Scott thinks the efforts to renew the park, and the neighborhood, are sometimes troubling. He says the removal of the basketball courts, the swimming pool, and the selective programming in the park—folk music and swing dancing instead of hip hop—have led to a pattern of exclusion.

“It’s interesting when you really start looking at what is here, and what isn’t here,” he says, speaking of the park and 3CDC, “and you can kind of start forming a picture of the person they want down here.”

In places as different as Over the Rhine and super-hip East Austin, as well as in mega cities like Boston, Chicago, San Francisco and many other places across the nation , new theories are converging to irrevocably alter the face of inner cities – and many cities are starting to form a very particular picture of the person they want.

Often tied to cultural amenities like art, theater and live music, these new theories about how a city should look – and who should live in city neighborhoods -- are often lumped under one, buzzworthy heading: place making.

At its heart is a fundamental re-ordering of the way Americans live in cities large and small. Increasingly, people with lower incomes, often minorities, are being shifted to suburbs while inner city neighborhoods across the country become whiter and higher-priced.

Experts say it is the biggest shift in America’s urban landscape in 60 years, and that it has huge, controversial implications for millions of people who live in inner city neighborhoods.

Though very different in many ways, OTR and East Austin illustrate various phases of America’s 21st Century place making project, showing both its promise and its troubling implications. The movement is sweeping the country, sparked in part by an

urban theorist named Richard Florida, who says the future will be driven by a generation of workers called the creative class.

OTR is an almost classic case of the kind of place making that Florida advocates – and that more and more cities seem to want to emulate. OTR boasts many assets that place makers dream of: 19th-Century, European-style architecture—over 900 buildings on the National Registry of Historic places—a rich arts and music scene, and a sense of history, specifically German heritage.

It has been a ripe environment for city planners and developers – with the end goal of luring young professionals back to the inner city.

These place making efforts have clearly brought a new energy to OTR and other neighborhoods around the country. But they’ve also sparked a great number of debates about what is lost – who gets lost – when cities are subject to the Place Making regimen. In Cincinnati, for instance, since renovations began around Washington Park, the neighborhood has lost 400 long-time black residents.¹

In many cases, the grand place making plans to redevelop urban areas are displacing more than bones from historic cemeteries as flesh and blood long-term residents increasingly find themselves shuffled off by rising prices, or culturally alienated by efforts to “create a new narrative” in their neighborhoods.

Washington Park's reopening ceremony in July, 2012 seemed like a triumph for the city leaders.

Mayor Mark Mallory spoke under a cloudless summer sky, looking hot but animated in his immaculately tailored suit and white brimmed hat as he praised the project as a milestone for the neighborhood and the city. As he addressed hundreds of attendees, listeners could see, over his shoulder, the looming, block-long gothic edifice of Music Hall. Built in 1878, the red brick venue is a link to the neighborhood's German heritage and home to the city's symphony. It's a keystone asset in the neighborhood, a magnet that draws high-brow arts and culture events and the city elite who attend them.

Chad Munitz, 3CDC's vice president of development, also gave brief remarks. With his short hair, a light blue seersucker blazer and horn-rim glasses, he looked the part of a 1950s academic, though he spoke the language of 21st Century urban planners. He talked about renewing the vibrancy and future of the neighborhood. He mentioned the planning process, and how it took community input into account. Like the mayor, he insisted that the multi-million dollar makeover of the park was just one step in a sweeping plan to continue drawing people back to OTR.

After the speeches, a children's choir took the stage. The atmosphere was alive with excitement -- a new feeling in a city and a neighborhood that not long before many regarded as dying. The crowd included young families with baby strollers, hip twenty-

some things taking photos on smartphones and rolling up their jeans to play kickball, middle-aged professionals, and older men and women.

But also in attendance were 30 to 40 protestors, low-income residents of the community, and employees from various social service providers -- including the controversial Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless. They held signs proclaiming, "Housing Now!" and decrying 3CDC. One large sign had a diagram for an alternate version of the park designed by residents where the neighborhood-favorites -- the basketball courts and swimming pool -- were left intact.

As the crowd dispersed, two men began verbally accosting each other.

One, a white man, yelled at the protestors -- about how dangerous and run down the park was before, and that nothing about the way the renovations were planned has excluded anyone. His face turned red in the 100-degree heat.

The other was a black man selling copies of *Streetvibes*, a homeless advocacy paper put out by the GCCH. He claimed, at first sadly, then angrily, that everything about the park had changed; it seemed foreign to him now.

After a few minutes, both debaters were huddled over a copy of *Streetvibes* -- poring over one of the paper's famously provocative articles.

For a few seconds, at least, both men were less hostile to each other -- but it seemed they were still far from any agreement on the fate and future of this long-divisive neighborhood in the heart of Cincinnati.

A world away from the city planning TED talks and conferences that take place in every major city's convention centers, attended by earnest young urban planners from big-name universities, the debate over place making is being played out in places like

inner-city Cincinnati. Two men having a street-side shouting match over a set of theories they may not have a name for symbolize the growing debate over Richard Florida's plans for place making and the rising creative class.

The protests drew just a cursory mention from *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, the city's daily paper, or even from bloggers who usually feverishly follow development in the neighborhood. The bigger news seemed to be the new dog park, the new fountains, and the freshly installed, ornate gateways with designs mirroring some of the features of Music Hall.

But the protests at the opening day ceremonies and the shouting match that broke out as it ended encapsulate much larger issues.

Some long-term residents of old inner-city neighborhoods recoil at the basic assumptions about their communities that are helping drive redevelopment. Many have heard the terms "blighted," "wastelands," or "crime-ridden" in the news and shake their heads. The labels have been a seemingly endless fixture of media coverage.

But some others argue that the kind of place-making Florida prescribes is really a good thing – that it is a way to lure wealthier, more desirable next-door neighbors. Maybe the kind of people that will elevate property values – and who will have better luck demanding much needed city services for the neighborhoods.

Minority residents, though, fear it may just be another in a long history of displacements.

“Price Hill, Northside, Westwood, Fairmount, lot of em in Roselawn—they’re everywhere,” says Tommy Thompson as he lists the outer-ring neighborhoods north of downtown Cincinnati where his friends and family have moved to after leaving OTR.

He sits upright and slightly agitated in an office chair in a small, windowless room at the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless, just off Central Parkway at OTR’s southern edge. “It’s a lot of jumping around. People still don’t have a stable place to be.”

Thompson, in his fifties, has lived in OTR off and on for much of his life. His direct gaze, warm voice and wide shoulders seem less the attributes of an activist and more the traits of a businessman. He’s been both a volunteer for and a client of the GCCH, having spent some of his time in the neighborhood at the Drop Inn Center, the controversial homeless shelter directly across from Washington Park.

Now Thompson is living in low-income housing, working, and spending the rest of his time advocating for the homeless. As he sits, he’s busy uploading videos about affordable housing he’s made onto YouTube.

Despite his role as an activist, Thompson has a fairly balanced take on the neighborhood.

“It’s heavy feelings on both sides,” he laughs. Thompson claims the Section 8 list in Cincinnati is three and a half years long, and that more than 13,500 people are officially waiting for affordable housing. “No one is looking at that group of people who need the help,” he says. “That’s what makes it kind of tough.”

Thompson says he sees a lot of positives in the changes taking place in the neighborhood. “I think it’s more diverse now. Lots of businesses are moving down here, lots of things you didn’t used to see. It’s like it’s going through a cycle, and it’s getting wrung out and cleaned out.”

Whether it needs “wrung out” is something Thompson is hesitant about, however. He describes much of OTR as “family driven,” an uncommon descriptor for the neighborhood in media and development narratives.

“If there wasn’t so much stuff on the news, so much stuff advertised, this would be considered a family community. But no one will say that because everyone wants this place to be hardcore. I don’t feel the news is getting the whole story. There’s hidden treasure in the midst of darkness. Those are the people who are keeping this community afloat, and they have been for years.”

Thompson says the waves of redevelopment and new residents are shifting the character of the neighborhood, for good and for bad. “It’s changed kinda like a picture—you paint over a picture. The whole picture isn’t totally repainted, but you can see in some areas, it’s been wiped away.”

The repainting is happening quickly. A 2012 report by the Brookings Institute² shows that population growth in 27 of America’s 51 largest cities is higher than in surrounding suburbs for the first time since the 1920s.

This reversal, led by high gas prices, the housing crash, dropping urban crime rates, and a Millennial generation fascinated with urban living, could signify a fundamental shift away from decades of suburbanization.

Areas in major cities that are within two miles of City Hall (the geographic measuring stick for a “downtown” area) have seen populations increase by 13 percent from 2010 to 2011.³ The shifts are occurring in cities that were losing residents at an alarming rate little more than a decade ago.

“It has taken awhile, but, in general, I think [urban population growth has happened] because we have slowly reinvented our downtowns as the “fun parts” of our metro areas, by which I mean as the entertainment and social hubs that downtowns have long been in other parts of the world,” says David Plane, a geographer at Arizona State University who helped author U.S. census reports on downtown populations.

Plane says it’s the young and college-educated leading the charge, causing big business and municipalities to take notice and reexamine inner cities. “My kids’ generation is now rediscovering what urban life can be,” he says. “The hot colleges and universities are the urban ones, not the remote state colleges.”

The business world is catching on to this shift and coming back to inner city markets after having abandoned them decades ago. Real estate companies and developers are also seeing dollar signs in the relatively cheap, less developed urban areas left to decay by white flight. These development schemes are often greeted eagerly by city halls and city managers, who “lust after the tax base” these developments might represent, according to Plane.

From 2006 to 2012, Cincinnati saw 5,000 more people moving to its urban core, a 12 percent spike in the downtown areas including the once “deserted” Over the Rhine. ⁴It’s an incredible turnaround for a city that in 2004 was ranked number one in the nation in population loss. While the city as a whole is still seeing a net loss in population, what was once a flood of outgoing people is slowing to a scant trickle. Meanwhile, inner-city neighborhoods like Over the Rhine continue to see a wave of new residents.

At about the same time urban population trends began reversing themselves in the early days of the 21st Century, Florida began putting together theories that would set the tone for now-ubiquitous urban redevelopment trends.

Florida is no stranger to the post-industrial malaise that gripped many American cities in the latter half of the 20th Century. He was born in Newark and grew up in a rough town in New Jersey called North Arlington, a background that has perhaps informed his crusade to transform urban America. He earned his doctorate in urban planning at Columbia and is now a senior editor for *The Atlantic’s Atlantic Cities* website, and also a professor at for a “prosperity” think tank at The University of Toronto.

Florida has popularized a particular version of place making, and over the past decade, his strategies have been employed with varying degrees of success in cities like Denver, Flint, Michigan, Boston, Memphis, and myriad others.

“Fostering new ideas comes best in authentic, historic neighborhoods, which excite people,” Florida once told the *Washingtonian*. He cites an uncommon city as an

example of authenticity in the interview. “Think of Palo Alto, where Hewlett-Packard and Apple were born,” he says of a city most often associated with Stanford University, high-end, glossy modern architecture, and the birth of tech giants like Google and Facebook. “Around there, John Steinbeck wrote, the Merry Pranksters ran around, and the Grateful Dead was born. Such old neighborhoods have rich characteristics, where people mix and mingle.”⁵

While a professor at Carnegie Mellon University, Florida wrote *The Rise of the Creative Class*. The 2002 book described what he claimed was the new economic realities of post-industrial cities— that “success” will be decided by “idea industries” like technology, marketing, and design, not the old-school manufacturing base.

Florida claims that to be competitive in these new realities, cities must court the “Creative Class,” a segment of highly-educated, mostly young, professionals who work in idea-driven fields like technology, design, entertainment, marketing, and the arts.

To attract these valuable potential residents, cities must engage in place making, or employing cultural amenities such as public parks, thriving local arts scenes, and well-designed, walkable neighborhoods. These hip young professionals can be choosy about where they live, argues Florida, but if they chose to live in your city, jobs will follow, as large companies flock toward the pool of talent and startups blossom.

Following its release, Florida’s book gained some buzz, winning the Political Book Award from *Washington Monthly*. The *Harvard Business Review* named it a “breakthrough idea” the year of its publication. Florida’s ideas were passed from city planner to city planner, and he was invited to conferences around the country. Politicians and other academics sought him and his book out. After its publication and his next book,

The Creative Class and Cities, Florida had morphed into something of a guru for 21st Century urbanism.

As his stature as a pop-urbanist solidified, a handful of economists and other academics began to question his data and methodology, and he was criticized by social justice activists for his blasé attitude toward gentrification. Despite the protests, however, Florida remained undeniably influential on the planning scene, and the cities he highlighted in *Rise of the Creative Class* are routinely cited as examples of the new urban renewal.

And perhaps no American city has become a more celebrated example of Florida's theories on the creative class and place-making than the self-described capital of live music, Austin, Texas.

Section Two: Austin: Cultural Capital

The usually-vacant field stretching four city blocks between East 4th and 5th Streets in Austin is a teeming sea of asymmetrical hair, jean shorts, horn-rimmed glasses, and flat-brimmed baseball caps or anachronistic fedoras.

It's March 2013, and the city's famed South by Southwest Festival is in full swing. In the sprawling field in the heart of East Austin, thousands stand in line for wristbands granting access to Fader Fort, a four-day party put on by *Fader*, a national music magazine. Those in line had to be in the know, RSVPing online in what turned out to be a ten-minute window for the privilege of obtaining one of the thousands of wristbands.

Fader Fort's presence on the East Side makes sense. It's Austin's edgy, hipster neighborhood, one that looks a little like a scaled-down SXSW on any given Saturday anyway. Grungy, single-story bars line busy streets like East 6th, along with single-speed bicycle shops and independent art galleries.

Bands play places like The Volstead, an almost dilapidated one-room bar. Tattooed twenty-somethings filter in and out of the various mural-splashed buildings, from Shangri-La, a windowless, cinder-block room with a pool table, jukebox, and framed gun paintings on the wall, to Cheer Up Charlies', a queer-friendly bar draped in painted rainbows and strange, psychedelic smiling lips.

Inside Fader Fort, a series of corrugated metal barns are transformed into a winding, cobbled-together shrine to the hipster lifestyle. Converse, a sponsor, sells T-shirts, and a sort of installation art piece made of sneakers hangs from the ceiling. A duo

of DJs stand sealed in a glass booth, mixing frenetically, though it is unclear if the music playing over the speakers in the barn is their work or not. A line forms along one wall as attendees wait to mug for professional photos. In one corner, mohawked barbers give free haircuts.

Other parts of the barn complex feature free beer and video game demos provided by a leading gaming company. The Dell room has computers from which concert-goers can watch bands from across the country play on the stage 200 yards away, use social media, and create their own live feed of the concert. Cylinders of free Vitamin Water stand outside that company's outdoor booth. Further from the entrance, an enormous 20-foot-tall tent shelters the stage and a series of cameras on small cranes hovering over the audience.

In the Sirius Radio chill-out area, a man with greying hair and a British accent talks about Bushwick, Brooklyn. Nearby, a tall, boyish concertgoer walks around in a t-shirt with an emblem in the shape of Michigan. It's the essential SXSW experience— young and young at heart purveyors of music, art, and technology coming together from distant lands to partake in an odd mix of culture and advertising.

From its origins as a music conference started in 1987, SXSW has blossomed into a behemoth series of events encompassing hip new advances in technology, film, visual arts and design, education, and of course music. Around the city, hundreds of showcases, panel discussions, parties, and meetups will fill the 10 days of SXSW.

Tech gurus, app designers, video game fanatics, and good old fashioned nerds will gather downtown at the Austin Convention Center for SXSW Interactive. Visual

artists and designers will check out Flatstock, an enormous event highlighting rock and roll poster design. And of course, thousands will stream into Austin just for the myriad of music events and parties around the city, many boasting free beer and free food.

All together, the feverish cultural hum of this springtime week in Austin will draw 11,000 hotel reservations averaging almost five nights a room, host 2,200 music acts, draw around 300,000 people, 85 percent of which are estimated to be from out of town, and contribute \$190 million to the city's economy.⁶ Badges for SXSW, which are required for many events, can run up to a mind-numbing \$1600 for the platinum, all access pass.

SXSW does not so much transform Austin as much as magnify the traits Florida has found so appealing about the city. They are traits that, Florida claims, account for its meteoric rise as an American city of the 21st Century. Both the festival and Austin itself are places where huge tech companies like Dell and Samsung and smaller, hipper startups feel compelled to have a presence.

Both are platforms that launch a thousand bands and brands, and both are go-to destinations for aspiring artists and filmmakers. In this way, the festival is a neat analogue for Florida's creative class and place making theories. It draws in creative talent, culture producers, and industry players, and turns this drawing power into money. In the process, it boosts Austin's economy and its brand as a premier city in a national economy now dominated by ideas, knowledge, and creativity.

Of course, Florida didn't invent SXSW, and for that matter, his ideas didn't create Austin's current success. Austin has focused on technological industries for decades by

virtue of the presence of the University of Texas' flagship campus and government-funded technical research groups like Sematech, a semiconductor laboratory.

It's also had a thriving cultural scene for years, with Austin City Limits and SXSW marking the city as the place for music since the 1980s. Austin codified this commitment to technology and the creative industry further in its "Next Century Economy" plan, put together in 1998, four years before Florida's *Rise of the Creative Class*.

It's clear that Florida has taken a great deal of inspiration from Austin's ascendancy, however, and that the city, along with hundreds of others, has in turn further embraced many of the ideas he espouses. Florida was the keynote speaker at 2003's SXSW Interactive festival, where he addressed the crowd with a speech called, "You Are the Creative Class, and You Rule." Two years prior, he also appeared at the Austin 360 Summit, a gathering of business and civic leaders.

While moderating a panel he cut to the heart of his thesis about the importance of this new, vital group. He exhorted the panelists, important CEOs and investors, to ask members of the band playing between panels how important creativity is to business innovation.

The kicker, according to Florida, is that the band members were all CEOs and venture capitalists themselves. He suggests that today, free-wheeling creatives and powerful business leaders are of a similar mind. To Florida, this is a kind of appreciation of diversity, a leveling of the playing field. Diversity and tolerance, according to Florida's theories, are very important, because creative class workers find these traits attractive in a city.

But what do these ideas mean to someone who is neither a CEO nor member of the creative class? For the most part, Florida's theories are quiet on this point, and SXSW isn't supplying many answers either.

In a feisty article titled "South by Southwest: At America's Biggest Tech Conference, it's All About the Sell" lampooning SXSW 2013 on left-leaning *Mother Jones*' website, journalist Nick Bauman airs grievances against the festival. They echo many of the same criticisms that have been made of Florida's theories.

"For a gathering so driven by the pursuit of money," Bauman snarks, "the question of who has it—and who doesn't—goes almost completely unmentioned." He notes that "conversations about inequality are awkward. Conversations about futurism, tech triumphalism, entrepreneurship, and the 'intersections' thereof reign supreme."⁷

In the years since Florida theorized about and promoted the creative class, Austin's population increased by a staggering 20 percent, now nearing the 800,000 mark. More than 38,000 new residents streamed into the city in 2011 alone—an average of over 100 people a day.⁸

Many of these new arrivals are young, highly educated members of Florida's creative class, and they're hungry to live near the center of all the vibrancy. But downtown Austin is full and very expensive and the west side is limited by environmental regulations from fights against development dating back to the 1990s.

These battles between environmentalists and developers preserve Austin's vaunted quality of life and natural beauty, key factors in the eyes of place makers like Florida. However, they also make the west side even more expensive.

“When the developers and environmentalists finally found some common ground in the 1990s to funnel development downtown and off the pristine areas in west Austin, it was the minority communities that suffered,” says Dr. Andrew Busch, a professor of Human Geography at Miami University of Ohio who has studied East Austin extensively.

With limited options and a taste for close-in living, young professionals streaming into Austin at the turn of the millennium looked east, past the towering walls of Interstate 35, to a series of neighborhoods that were at one time legally segregated by Austin's 1928 Comprehensive Plan. The neighborhoods were still hosts primarily to the minority residents who found themselves shuffled there from their long-established communities by the 1928 plan.⁹

At the end of the 20th Century, the East Side was a place of single-family houses, some federal housing projects, and a number of small businesses. Vacant lots sat next to these structures like empty sockets where pulled teeth used to be—many the legacy of 1960s urban renewal, just one of many painful memories that haunted the East Side. Even proud, long term residents agree that by the late 90s, the neighborhood was seeing its share of struggles. Then came the creative class.

“It's a pretty lovely place to be,” artist Jennifer Chenoweth told the Austin American Statesman in 2011.¹⁰ Chenoweth, who is white, moved to the East Side in 1999 and rehabbed a “falling down old shack” on East 2nd Street. “I think East Austin

especially has a lot of Austin values,” she told reporter Juan Castillo for the article, a piece about the area’s racial demographic changes.

However, some see a darker side to the shift. “The creative side of Austin really marginalizes minority communities,” Dr. Busch says. He argues that policies undertaken by Austin from the late 90s to today, many of which operate on ideas similar to or borrowed from Florida’s theories on place-making and the creative class, are partly responsible for a drastic displacement of low income, minority residents.

Home prices in the 11th and 12th Street corridor, once the heart of East Austin’s black community, have jumped from \$50,000 in 2000 to well over \$200,000 in 2009, according to Darin Smith, lead consultant for Economic Planning Systems. EPS is an economic development group from Berkeley, California, hired in 2010 by the city of Austin to draw up further revitalization plans for the corridor.

In the same nine-year period, census data shows the number of minorities in the once-heavily black community had plummeted 27 percent. Meanwhile, white residents increased by 40 percent.

Tommy Wyatt, who runs The Villager, a community paper based just off the highway on East 12th Street, says that many of his readers who formerly lived in East Austin have moved to outlying suburbs, former farming communities such as Round Rock and Pflugerville that are filled with modestly priced subdivisions.

“When I came to Austin, this was called a black community,” Wyatt says. “It no longer has that title. We’ve dispersed all over the county.”

Descriptions in the media of East Austin as a “lovely place” would have been very out of the ordinary at the turn of the millennium. At the time, the East Side was a place much-maligned, a neighborhood local news reporters said was full of danger, drugs, and “blight.”

An analysis of 54 articles in *The Austin American Statesman* dating from 1989 to 2011 covering the heart of East Austin’s black community, the 11th and 12th Street corridor, found coverage to be overwhelmingly negative. The word “blight” or similar terms including “wasteland” and “ghetto” appear 78 times in the articles, and references to crime, addiction, and vice (including articles calling people in the neighborhood “whores” and “winos”) appear 175 times.

This narrative by the city’s only daily paper, which at the time had a circulation of 180,000, contributed to the negative tone about the East Side in Austin, almost certainly helping to drive property values down. But as new residents flowed into Austin looking for places near the heart of the city, the East Side became more and more attractive, especially to young “urban pioneers” who romanticized the neighborhood’s grit.

Newspapers and other media outlets promoted the influx as a renewal for East Austin. Even before the Robertson Hill Apartments (costing \$2000 a month) were even finished, and well before crime rates fall, the media trumpeted the neighborhood’s renaissance. *The Austin American Statesman* published editorials by young urban pioneers, including one titled “Here Comes the Neighborhood,” celebrating the East Side’s renaissance.

In that article, written right around the time Florida addressed Austin 360 in 2003, *Statesman* staff writer Michael Corcoran boasted: “I’m not intimidated by the prostitutes, drug dealers, scam artists and shrieking domino players at that corner,” referring to the intersection of 12th and Chicon, which had been a symbol of the East Side’s decay in everything from the *Statesman* to the *Washington Post*. Corcoran isn’t scared. Just annoyed. “The downside of life in the ‘hood,” he wrote, “besides the all-hours rolling thunder of screwed-down rap, is that there aren’t many places to hang out. It’s all barbershops and churches.”

He is enthused, however, about how “the real East Austin is fast becoming our version of NYC’s Lower East Side circa the 1980s, an artists colony for the adventurous.” Corcoran tells his presumably creative class audience, “You should see all the tattooed people and girls with horn-rimmed glasses riding bikes up and down East 12th.” The editorial finishes by remarking that the lack of a hangout will change with the arrival of the new bar that Corcoran plugs for the rest of the article.¹¹

It’s a triumphant story of 21st Century revitalization, an illustration of how the creative class can bring a neighborhood back to life. Unless, of course, you happen be one of the prior residents who think the neighborhood was never dead in the first place.

“If it’s so bad, they wouldn’t be riding those bicycles up and down through here, right?”

Scottie Ivory says what she wants to say. She is 88 years old and has lived in in the 11th and 12th Street corridor since she was seven. She is sweet but sharp-tongued, and has little patience for those who would denigrate her neighborhood.

“We’ve always had a black eye over here. Let me tell you something about the news people. Just forget the news people.”

Ivory admits the neighborhood has had its problems, but is frustrated with what she sees as an exaggeration of her community’s woes and a lack of recognition for the attempts community members have made to solve problems themselves.

She sits in her house just a block from the legendary intersection at 12th and Chicon. It’s a small but tidy place with walls covered in photos from various periods of East Austin’s history. She’s especially proud of a photo from Life Magazine of her father, a prominent minister in the black community, baptizing a member of his congregation in the Colorado River. He died ten days after his 100th birthday. Now, the church he led just up the street from Ivory’s house sits empty. There are plans to turn it into a recording studio. “That’s holy ground,” she says.

She’s been around long enough to see many attempts at changing the neighborhood, starting with the federally-funded urban renewal efforts in the 60s and 70s that left many older buildings simply bulldozed, with empty lots in their wake. After that, it was the Austin Revitalization Authority, a group put together by Austin City Council in 1995 to redevelop the 11th and 12th Street area.

The city gave the ARA funds and power to create a development plan for 11th and 12th streets. Its history is an apt metaphor for the fumbling, tangled attempts to develop the neighborhood in the 1990s.

The ARA became controversial with residents quickly after its founding because it was composed of people who many claimed did not represent the neighborhood.

Despite this, it drew up plans for large-scale developments such as department stores and malls. However, few of these plans came to fruition.

Many residents were strongly opposed to or at least distrustful of the ARA, yet it continued as part of the development effort until its eventual dismissal in 2010, after millions of city and federal grant dollars were spent on administrative costs and land purchases associated with the organization.

Meanwhile, industrious residents like Ivory were putting together their own plans to improve the neighborhood. She recalls one members of the neighborhood presented to the city in 1997.

“We spent a lot of time planning. We met at [local churches] Guadalupe and Ebenezer. The neighborhood came out, and we had maps and everything. We put in what we like to see in the neighborhood. I told [ARA President] Byron Marshall, ‘you betrayed us.’ We wasted a lot of our energy and time helping you with the plan and you act like you really want to accept it. And what do you do? You build those expensive apartments that none of us can live in.”

Ivory says she and many others have invested years of work into the neighborhood they love, only to be ignored by the city and media obsessed by top-down development strategies and constructed narratives about the neighborhood; first, that it was a dangerous, dying place, and now, that it is a place saved by the influx of young creative professionals.

“People don’t think about it,” Ivory says. “Listen, I went down to the city historical center downtown and I didn’t find hardly anything... I said, is this all you have on East Austin? As many businesses as there were? Black folks were entrepreneurs and

everything else, and you mean to tell me this is all the history you have from here? I need to get a camera or something and take what's here and there before it's all changed.”

Ivory's stories about East Austin as an intact community capable of handling its own problems aren't unique.

Organizations by and for residents, such as the Blackland and Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporations, have been working to address neighborhood issues in East Austin since the 1980s. They receive little mention in the press, and little help from a city preoccupied by creative class-driven development, but according to GNDC Executive Director Mark Rogers, they've been incredibly effective.

“[The neighborhood corporations] knew there was incredible value in the community—the people--- and in the fact there were roots in the churches and families and shops and barbershops that were around up on 12th or wherever. I think the people who were here started seeing the changes that the neighborhood corporations were doing. People were very involved in community policing-- they had CB radios and confronted prostitutes and the little gang guys doing graffiti. LBJ School did an analysis of the area showing the neighborhood had lower crime than the city average.”

Rogers, who is white, is a 20-year resident of the Guadalupe neighborhood just south of the 11th and 12th Street corridors, sits in the small office on the bottom floor of GNDC's attractive, relatively new apartment complex overlooking Interstate 35 and downtown. He reflects on the changing climate of the neighborhood.

“The first big rush on East Austin was late 90s, early 2000’s. And we just watched it--- our applications went to 100, then 200. Almost all of which were people who had been long-time renters in the neighborhood,” he says.

Rogers and the GNDC, along with Blackland and other neighborhood development corporations, fight an uphill battle ensuring housing in East Austin stays affordable. At stake, he says, is the very character of the community.

“Best case scenario--- we keep a diverse neighborhood,” he says. “Worst case scenario, it becomes a predominantly white or affluent neighborhood—when you say diversity, you have to think about economic diversity. That’s what I really see being lost. It’s not so much an ethnic cleansing as an economic cleansing. ‘If we can get the poor people out of the downtown area...’ there are a lot of people who would think of that as a success.”

[The Victory Grill: Home to East Austin’s Original “Creative Class.” \(Video\)](#)

Over their neighborhood’s long history, residents of East Austin used music to build grass-roots community from within. One of the 11th Street neighborhood’s most celebrated cultural institutions, the Victory Grill, opened in 1945 as a place for returning black servicemen to congregate. Soon, it was a busy music venue, hosting world-famous stars such as B.B. King and Billie Holiday. In the process, it became a center for East Austin’s black community. The Grill still hosts music today, and its story is a fascinating contrast to practices designed to entice the Creative Class.

Section Three: Cincinnati: Ten Years Behind the Times

There's an aphorism attributed to Mark Twain, sometimes repeated in Cincinnati, that goes, "when the world ends, I want to be in Cincinnati, because it's ten years behind the times."

Whether Twain actually said it or not, it's an accurate way to describe the city compared to 21st Century tech boomtowns like Austin. The transformation of Austin's East Side is in its advanced stages-- some would even say complete. High rises full of condos, modernist homes that look like habitable Rubick's cubes, and hip bars and cafes serving \$15 brunches, dot the East Side. By comparison, the transformation in Cincinnati's Over the Rhine is just now gaining momentum.

Cincinnati, the first big city in America's first frontier in the early 19th Century, spent much of the waning days of the 20th teetering on the edge of Rustbelt oblivion. Between 1980 and 2000, the city's population dropped by 55,000 people as unemployment, crime, and racial tensions rose.

Over the Rhine was especially hard-hit by the problems facing many inner city neighborhoods at the turn of the millennium, due in part to planning decisions made by Cincinnati decades earlier. While not legally segregated the way East Austin had been, OTR's socio-economic makeup was the legacy of 1960s urban renewal policies.

Instead of knocking down homes and other buildings piecemeal as in Austin, Cincinnati's planners leveled an entire black neighborhood called Kenyon Barr just southwest of OTR and displaced an estimated 40,000 low-income residents. The city made little attempt to help them relocate. The population of this city within a city now reduced to dust drifted off to Cincinnati's other low-income neighborhoods. Many came to OTR, a place historically inhabited by the marginalized and low-income. At one time a booming, crowded home to tens of thousands of German immigrants who gave the neighborhood its name, by the time Kenyon Barr came down, OTR was inhabited mostly by poor whites of Appalachian descent lured to the city in the 1940s by industrial jobs. By the 1970s, the neighborhood was majority black as it took on those displaced by Cincinnati's slum clearance policies.

With many community bonds broken and local institutions dissolved, even poorer than they had been before, displaced blacks experienced the difficulties endemic to America's neglected inner cities—drugs, crime, unemployment, homelessness, white flight, declining schools and civic organizations, and a general isolation from the rest of the city and its surrounding suburbs. It's also here, many long-term residents claim, that they forged a new community, albeit one ignored by most in the city.

Racial and class tensions hummed through the neighborhood. Race riots broke out in 1967 and 1968, and in the years between 1960 and 1980, the neighborhood lost 80 percent of its population to white flight. When local papers like *The Cincinnati Post* and *The Cincinnati Enquirer* mentioned the neighborhood, it was in reference to drugs, guns, or both. Buildings deteriorated as landlords stopped investing in their properties. By

2000, only 8,000 people lived in a neighborhood that held 45,000 a century before. Some 80 percent of them were black.¹²

In 2001, as Austin's population boomed and young creatives streamed into the East Side, Cincinnati's population continued to bleed out. And things in OTR were about to take a dramatic turn for the worse with a single, tragic event.

The scene that blurred past Timothy Thomas in the early morning of April 7 2001 was an eerie, haphazard piling up of history.

As he sprinted down Vine Street, OTR's main thoroughfare, he passed the empty-eyed hulks of once-vibrant theaters, social halls, and stately apartment buildings tucked into the darkness, their shaded sides wearing faded, decades-old advertisements for cigarettes and Paramount brand Vodka.

From Vine, Thomas ducked through the dim, narrow maze of brick that makes up Over-the-Rhine's side streets, a claustrophobic world of fire escapes, shuttered stores peeling paint, and old industrial buildings.

About fifteen minutes before, the 19-year-old had stepped out of his nearby apartment for a pack of cigarettes, leaving his fiancée Monique Wilcox and their three-month-old son Tywon behind.

On his brief trip, he was spotted by off-duty officers working security at a gothic nightclub on one of the busier and rougher sections of Vine Street. Recognizing Thomas, they radioed on-duty officers in the area, who began pursuing him for outstanding warrants. Though those 14 warrants were for minor violations—traffic infractions, failure to wear a seatbelt, and other misdemeanors--Thomas ran.

The pursuit did not last long. In a corridor just wide enough for one person to walk the crumbling brickwork path, Thomas came face to face with officer Stephen Roach, a scared 26 year old white police officer patrolling what many told him was the most dangerous part of town. In a split second, Roach, who had jumped out of a squad car to intercept Thomas, shot him in the chest.

At the scene that night, Officer Roach, 26, told his commanding officer his gun “just went off.” He would later report that in the darkness of the alley they shared, Thomas appeared to be reaching into the waistband of his baggy pants for a weapon.

Despite this testimony, it was quickly discovered that Thomas had no gun with him. The moment he fell silent, the lingering but long-quiet anger in OTR became increasingly audible.

In the low-lying part of the city around downtown and OTR, people held their breath. Something is picking up inertia—angry sentiments passed from neighbor to neighbor. Questions get louder.

By April 9, tensions bubbled over and hundreds of protestors shouted down councilmembers at a Law and Public Safety meeting. A crowd of two hundred people—from black civic leaders in suits and ties to tough teenage boys with their arms folded across their white t-shirts-- crammed into the antiseptic white-walled council chambers at City Hall. A white-haired woman wore a shirt emblazoned with an enormous sunflower, a symbol of OTR’s populist (some would say radical) “People’s Movement.” Protesters, some holding hand-written signs with ominous messages like “Cop killers,” stood with defiant looks on their faces. The group refused to let officials leave for three hours. They demanded answers to a single question—why?

They gathered around a stone-faced woman at a microphone. Thomas' mother Angela Leisure held the hand of Thomas' 16-year-old brother Terry and said, "this is my other son. I know he has a ticket." Her voice ran ice cold as her mouth turned down bitterly at the edges. "Is he going to die too?"

The crowd behind Leisure roared.

Protesters left the confrontation and headed downtown, where the cracks in the public order continued to widen. There, the 200 angry protesters who showed up to the meeting swelled to a group of over 1000. A statement by various police officials outside police headquarters slowly devolved into shouting, name-calling and then rock-throwing by the crowd.

What began as a protest over Thomas' death become five days of the most violent urban unrest in America since L.A.'s Rodney King riots a decade before. Store windows were shattered, buildings burned, and OTR was forever changed.

The lawlessness of those five days was whole and terrifying—innocent people wer dragged out of cars and beaten, merchandise was carried from furniture and appliance stores, and rocks heaved in the direction of police and other safety officials.

At one point, according to a story in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, fire officials had to stop responding to calls because there were not enough police to protect them while they put out the numerous blazes that are popping up around OTR. One officer, Andrew Nogueira, was shot on Vine Street, though luckily his belt buckle deflected the bullet. It would take a declaration of a state of emergency and a strictly-enforced 8 pm curfew to finally calm the violence.

The unrest was more than just opportunistic looting—the rage of OTR residents was directed toward perceived injustices in Cincinnati’s law enforcement and governing systems, and in a more general sense, against the poverty and perception of the neighborhood as a forsaken place.

After the riots, violence in the neighborhood increased. One of the largest landlords serving Section 8 tenants went bankrupt, and almost 3,000 more residents left. Soon, 500 of the neighborhood’s buildings were empty. A flickering resurgence in nightlife and local business that had started to take hold in the late 90s along Main Street on the neighborhood’s east side simply died. It was a nadir for the neighborhood, but also a powerful catalyst for a new era of feverish redevelopment efforts led by city planners and a cabal of the region’s most powerful businessmen.

In 2003, then-mayor Charlie Luken created an initiative to band together local business leaders, developers, and the city. The coalition became the Cincinnati City Center Development Corporation, made up of executives from Proctor and Gamble, Western and Southern Insurance, the publisher of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, and other business elites.

The group gained non-profit status and began buying up properties with money from private investment, federal grants, and city contributions. It also began pouring money into public spaces like downtown’s Fountain Square and eventually, OTR’s Washington Park, gaining the right to manage these properties as well.

Their efforts were heavily informed by Florida's Creative Class theories, and by the summer of 2012, they had built to a climax, drawing new residents to the neighborhood and also creating new divisions.

Justine Ludwig sits in a café in downtown Cincinnati across from her office at the city's Contemporary Arts Center, an imposing, asymmetrical building designed by famous architect Zaha Hadid. Her black hair is short, just above her ears, and she takes her time with her words, annunciating each one carefully and in a way that announces she's not originally from Cincinnati.

Ludwig, 26, is assistant curator at the CAC, a position she's held since 2008, when she came to Cincinnati from Colby College, a private liberal arts school in Maine. When Florida describes the Creative Class, he might very well be talking about Ludwig.

Shortly after moving to the city, she finds her way to Over the Rhine, moving into a third-floor apartment on Main Street, an artsy sibling to the more grown-up Vine Street that hosts many of the neighborhood's galleries and music venues.

"Due to financial constraints, I had to move somewhere where I could walk to work, somewhere really cheap, and OTR was the only place for that," she says.

"Living in OTR, I could have really nice hardwood floors, exposed brick walls. That was really attractive."

She says the architecture in the neighborhood is stunning, and a big reason she was drawn here. A self-identified "creative," she was also drawn to the independent art scene in the neighborhood. After moving to OTR, she quickly becomes a collaborator with various local galleries. Ludwig claims the galleries are a big part of the

neighborhood's resurgence, making the neighborhood feel "hipper" and "safer," though she notes many of the places that were galleries when she moved in are now bars.

On the other hand, she claims the poverty she saw in OTR upon arriving was shocking. "I'd worked in some pretty bad parts of Boston, and you saw homeless people on the street," she says, "but you didn't see their whole life out in front of you the way you see in OTR."

Ludwig claims the poverty hasn't really gone away, but has just moved to other parts of the neighborhood. "The type of people the city is trying to attract into Over the Rhine would be terrified if they saw that."

At the time she moved, the neighborhood had a bad reputation, according to Ludwig. "It was interesting, because when I moved there it was before it was cool to live in OTR, when everyone was like, "you're going to get shot there." But as she describes her experience with the neighborhood, she echoes of Tommy Thompson's claims about family ties and deep-rooted community.

"There were tons and tons of families here when I first moved here," she says. "There are no families south of Liberty Street now. I miss seeing kids who actually live here."

Ludwig says many of the families around her when she moved in have either left the neighborhood entirely or have moved north of Liberty Street, where 3CDC-led redevelopment efforts end.

"It's a completely different neighborhood," she says.

After the 2001 riots, 3CDC bought properties all over OTR, many purchased en masse from landlords wanting to leave the neighborhood. Some were rehabbed and leased out. Others that may not yet be profitable to renovate were stabilized, locked up, and held for future use.

So far, 3CDC has focused its resources on the so-called “Gateway Corridor,” an area just north of downtown on Vine Street, which runs through the heart of the neighborhood. There, it has rehabbed many buildings and leased them to boutique clothing retailers, art and home furnishing galleries, and restaurants like Senate, which features \$8 hotdogs and duck fat fries.

Also lining the corridor are the latest additions to OTR’s portfolio of creative businesses—small firms looking to spin off from Cincinnati’s deep involvement in the consumer marketing and design industry. One, called We Have Become Vikings, is a hip offshoot of Landor, an international design firm with its U.S. headquarters in Cincinnati. WHBV has an edgy, hipster vibe, but its portfolio includes work for some of Cincinnati’s biggest corporations as well.

In 2012, the same year the company set up shop in OTR, it launched a promotional campaign called “DOWN.” The campaign sent several Cincinnati bands to Austin and the SXSW festival, and included other promotional stunts, such as giving away guitars from a flatbed truck in downtown Austin. The campaign may have also included some covert graffiti – including some that ironically linked Austin directly to Cincinnati.

The patio for Kenny Dorham’s Backyard, a historic venue neighboring the Victory Grill in the heart of East Austin, is still marked with spray-painted DOWN logos a year later.

Another company, the Brandery, has been set up by corporate-connected funds like the Proctor and Gamble Fund and the Duke Energy Foundation as an incubator for startups, especially in the social media and marketing realm. It’s an especially Floridian move designed to attract young creative class folks.

Just to the west of Vine Street, the redeveloped Washington Park draws throngs of excited visitors for folk music concerts, craft fairs, and other events. So far, it’s the crown jewel 3CDC’s efforts, but that will change in late 2013, when the enormous Mercer Commons project is finished. A mixed-use space for condos and commercial spaces, Mercer will run well over \$50 million.¹³

A few blocks north of the sleek new storefronts advertising the marketing firms and OTR’s creative renaissance, an abrupt change takes place. New glass and clean steel become boarded up windows, often covered in faded, once-cheery paint and bearing the 3CDC logo. 19th Century buildings with ornate flourishes stand covered in grime. Here, the new OTR ends.

It’s not just the buildings that are different here. OTR’s bifurcated development has created the largest income disparity of any neighborhood in the country, according to a census report issued in 2012. The divide is the city’s old boundary line—Liberty Street, once the gateway to “the northern liberties,” the part outside city law.

South of Liberty Street, median household income has rocketed up 20 percent from 2006 to more than \$40,000 a year, and that figure looks to keep rising. It's certainly not wealthy, but it's a huge jump from just five years ago.

There is also a growing population of residents making upward of \$100,000 a year here. North of Liberty, however, median income is about \$10,000 a year and falling, down 20 percent from 2006.¹⁴

Boosters of development in the area, including 3CDC and the numerous blogs chronicling OTR's transformation, have pointed to this rise in income as a sign of progress. Bloggers have excitedly cheered each new step, celebrating the renovation of buildings, influx of new businesses, and the overall upscale atmosphere of the new OTR.

An Instagram account associated with one of the more prominent blogs has even invented a popular hashtag, #whipsofotr, for pictures of Bentleys, BMWs, and other dollar cars sighted on the streets of the neighborhood.

Others, however, including those in the social service industry, see the stark division between the southern and northern sections of the neighborhood and the lack of affordable housing development as signs all is not well.

In press releases and public statements, including one at the Washington Park ribbon-cutting, 3CDC has stressed its commitment to inclusiveness. The organization did not respond to multiple attempts to gain comment on this story, but supporters of the redevelopment say that change on the scale 3CDC attempts is complex and expensive. According to its own press releases and website, the corporation has spent \$324 million in redeveloping OTR and downtown. About half of this was provided by the Cincinnati

New Markets Fund and the Cincinnati Equity Fund, both of which are headed by corporations in the city and managed by 3CDC.

To date, little of this spending has resulted in affordable housing, going to condos, office space, and storefront space for upscale restaurants and shops. These developments have certainly driven economic revitalization in the area, but have also caused some apprehension among low-income residents.

3CDC's deep pockets are partially the result of private investment, but also spring from federal grants and tax credits totaling over \$85 million, according to the organization's website. TIF awards from the city also aid 3CDC's development efforts. The corporation's ability to effectively lend money to itself through its management of CNMF and CEF ensures low-cost capital for physical improvements.

This flow of funding makes possible the relatively high-risk enterprise of revitalizing OTR that would be otherwise impossible in the current economic climate. But its ability to spend large sums has also made it the major player in town in terms of redevelopment. This dominance in the neighborhood, necessary or not, has contributed to the north/south division and further inflamed those decades-old arguments.

Residents' concerns about 3CDC's activity came up during a public forum held at Elementz, a hip hop-oriented youth center, just after Washington Park reopened. During a discussion about Cincinnati's inclusion on a national list of 100 Best Places for Young People, the revitalization of OTR was a hot topic.

"You're not going to stop and ask people what their community is like, to try to interact with the neighborhood you're coming into to try and revitalize," said one

attendee, a life-long resident of OTR in her early 20s of developers working in the area.

“You can’t just revitalize the buildings. From a business point of view, I understand what they’re doing. Ok, you want to make Cincinnati better, you have to start somewhere. But people who want to help don’t always know how to help. My problem is, they’re revitalizing the buildings and not revitalizing people.”

In January 1978, a small cadre of social service workers led by a local activist named Buddy Gray forced its way on a freezing day into an empty building on 12th Street, caddy-corner to Washington Park. They set up shop and opened a shelter right down the street from Music Hall, host to events that were still drawing Cincinnati’s elite. It was technically illegal, but Gray and his allies bet the city would not evict them from the old Teamster’s lodge.

They were correct, much to the chagrin of those in the neighborhood with more development-friendly leanings, including a young entrepreneur named Jim Tarbell, who saw the shelter as a leftist political move more than an attempt to help people.

Through the next two decades, Tarbell and other developers squared off against Gray and his People’s Movement over gentrification, poverty, and the appropriate treatment of the poor. Gray died in 1996, shot by a mentally ill client, but the shelter still stands, just across the street from Washington Park. Today, it’s part of the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless – which is, in many ways, an extension of Gray’s People’s Movement.

Tarbell has his own legacy.

Originally a music promoter in Cincinnati, he's backed countless entrepreneurial and artistic efforts in the neighborhood. In some ways, he's the prototype for the place makers Richard Florida writes about, using cultural amenities to create a sense of place in OTR and lure middle class folks to an area they might not otherwise venture into.

A new generation of entrepreneurs inspired by music and art have picked up where Tarbell left off, usually with the help and funding of 3CDC. Their main triumph has been Midpoint, a music festival launched in 2002 featuring local and national bands along with panels on creative and technological industries staged in OTR and downtown. If it sounds like a mini SXSW, there's a reason for that. Organizers Sean Rhiney and Bill Donebedian have acknowledged Austin's influence on the festival, even considering calling it "Mid by Midwest" in its initial planning stages.

The *Cincinnati Enquirer* offered breathless coverage of the first stirrings of coming Midpoint Music Festival in 2002, noting,

"Rhiney and Donabedian have been working on this puppy since January - but it took off bigtime early this summer when Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, came to town and talked about "brain drain" and how a city needs a vibrant, nighttime arts and music scene to attract hip young professionals to town.

'That got the city involved in a big way,' Donabedian says. 'Both (City Council members) John Cranley and Jim Tarbell signed on, and that helped us bridge the gap into the corporate world and the sponsors we needed. It really took off then.'"

An editorial in the newsweekly *CityBeat* in 2004 goes further still, proclaiming the organizers "get the idea Richard Florida pushes in his 'creative class' theories about

how good local music scenes help attract young people, who then make those towns ‘cool’ and drive their economies.”

Through these new, 3CDC-backed movements, local place makers stepped in and applied Florida’s playbook to the game started by Tarbell. But he’s certainly not forgotten. His presence in the neighborhood continues through his ownership of a number of properties, and in the form of a four-story mural on a building at the beginning of the Gateway Corridor. The mural was painted in 2009 by the city.

In it, giant Jim Tarbell wears a tux with tails and tips his top hat in the direction of OTR, triumphantly welcoming visitors.

The mural and the shelter stand a few blocks apart , two monoliths symbolizing the still-ongoing fight between development and activists. It’s clear, however, that amid the growing number of young professionals moving into OTR and the relentless place making efforts of 3CDC, that activists are losing ground, though they haven’t given up yet.

Efforts at resident-led planning have been a staple of nonprofits in the community since the 1970s, though as in Austin, the grassroots planning efforts rarely draw attention from the city or the press. Alternate development plans involving resident input, including one drawn up for Washington Park restoring neighborhood-favorite amenities such as the pools and basketball courts, have been devised. But with 3CDC’s clout in the

area, often the most organizations can do is offer these plans to 3CDC as suggestions or focus on specific buildings.

In light of this, lately OTRCH has been as much about partnership as protest. Just days after Washington Park reopens in the summer of 2012, OTRCH holds a planning charette, a forum for residents to voice opinions and devise plans with the help of planning professionals.

This particular charette focuses on the stretch of OTR just north of Washington Park and extending just past Liberty Street on the neighborhood's western side. 30 residents of all colors and ages file into the Emanuel Community Center, a church-affiliated service organization that has been in OTR for 144 years.

Participants in the day-long planning session are particularly worried about the increasing divide apparent between north and south OTR. One resident expresses concern that Liberty Street could become a "demilitarized zone," a barrier between the haves and have-nots creating "two OTRs." Plans drawn up by residents feature ways to tie the two halves of the neighborhood together, including a business district on both sides of the street, green spaces extending from one side to the other, and decorative islands in the middle of Liberty providing visual continuity.

Plans also focus on a good mix of affordable and market-rate housing as well as space for small, locally-owned businesses such as Laundromats, small stores, and light industry that could provide jobs and opportunity for resident entrepreneurship.

A representative from 3CDC attends the charette to observe, staying part of the day. Partnerships between the corporation and OTRCH have happened in the past, resulting in a parcel of new homes just north of the OTRCH offices on Pleasant Street.

The original intent was to produce mixed income housing here. However, the units are currently all market rate.

Six months after the planning session, Emanuel sells its historic building to developers, who plan to use it to house a startup incubator for entrepreneurs looking for office space.

The building's gym, which had been used by neighborhood residents, will be converted into a squash court.

Some say it's unfortunate, but not necessarily surprising, that community-based organizations and planning efforts in OTR get little attention, and that news coverage outside 3CDC-led development is either negative or non-existent.

Bill Thompson and Jennifer Scroggins both worked as reporters for The Cincinnati Enquirer for over a decade. They sit in Tucker's, a diner on the northern half of Vine Street, to talk about OTR and news coverage.

Tucker's is a neighborhood staple, the kind of place with little pretension and a lot of street cred in the community. A neon-lined clock stands out on fake-wood paneled walls with little other ornamentation. Joe Tucker mans the grill along with a couple employees, serving up simple fare-- home fries, toast, and burgers.

Two years ago, a random shooting injured Carla Tucker, one of the owners, and the whole neighborhood rallied in her support. Soon, she was back at work. That kind of stubborn commitment represents their deep roots in the community.

“This is where they’ve made their stand,” Thompson says of the Tuckers. “This is home, and it’s probably not going to change, it’s not going to be remodeled or anything. And that is in direct loggerheads with all the new places.”

The same could easily be said of the many non-profits in OTR, from those in the GCCH to those with a less ideological slant. Over Tucker’s cheeseburgers and salads, Thompson and Scroggins discuss the Enquirer’s coverage of the neighborhood. They also speak frankly about the struggle non-profits seem to have getting the word out about their community-building work in the neighborhood, while the flashy startups and developers have little trouble creating a buzz around their work.

“Well, 3CDC has the ear of the established media,” Thompson says, referring to any number of articles about 3CDC projects and personnel. “That’s a huge thing,” Scroggins agrees.

One article, about the Washington Park renewal, says the park has gone from “frightful to friendly,” and cheers the higher income residents moving in.

Thompson and Scroggins don’t outright accuse the Enquirer of cheerleading 3CDC’s redevelopment, but do question the connections between the two. Thompson notes that Enquirer publisher Margaret Buchanan sits on the board of the development group.

“I don’t know how I feel about Margaret’s involvement in 3CDC. It think there’s something inherently sketchy to me about that,” Scroggins says.

“As a good corporate citizen, the newspaper should be involved,” Thompson opines. “However, when it crosses those bounds, there’s a whole other side. And if indeed if those [positive stories about the community] haven’t been killed, they’ve been

pitched and received a chilly reception. And after the second or third time, you start to feel as a reporter that ‘well, maybe we’re not going to do this, and there’s a reason why we’re not going to do this.’ I certainly have questioned many times ‘why are we doing this glowing profile about whomever when this or that seems much more newsworthy?’”

It’s a vital question at the heart of the way OTR is being redeveloped and the way place making efforts are, to use popular place-making terminology, “changing the narrative” of neighborhoods across the country.

Section Four: An Unaffordable Century?

“I really think we are living in an urban century,” demographer Plane says.

Though many economists have argued with the theories of Richard Florida, Plane says he thinks policies inspired by his creative class theories are among the “attitude shifters” that are “part of a package of trends” bringing increased populations to inner cities.

Florida himself remains influential, as a writer, academic, and speaker giving talks about his theories to mayors, chambers of commerce, and other policy leaders making decisions about the future of America’s cities. He’s as good at promoting himself as he is his ideas, with an active presence on Twitter, a website full of promotional shots of himself, and a full calendar of speaking engagements lined up.

The future for OTR seems to be bigger development. On the border of the neighborhood’s southeast corner, an enormous new casino has just opened. On Vine Street, 3CDC’s \$53 million Mercer Commons project is underway. Eventually, it will house more storefronts and \$250,000 condos.

Running through the heart of the neighborhood, a proposed transit line featuring vintage street car aesthetics will serve shoppers coming from uptown to peruse stores in OTR and downtown.

Meanwhile, rents are rising and apartments are becoming scarce. Tony Gray, 28, a young professional who moved to OTR three years ago and who lives at the Jackson Street Lofts just a block from Vine Street, says the rent on his 500 square foot efficiency

is up to \$650 a month. Last year, it was \$600. Three years before, the same apartment went for \$425.

Times are even tougher for those seeking affordable housing. For Model Group, one developer who operates affordable housing in OTR, the waiting list is more than 500 people long, according to its website. Meanwhile, the pressure is on social service agencies who have traditionally served low-income people in the neighborhood. Repeated attempts have been made by the city and 3CDC to move the Drop Inn Center from OTR, and other social service organizations have already been removed.

3CDC has pledged to provide affordable apartments in its developments, but critics claim it has a poor track record in this regard. In 2009, the group purchased a building next to the Contemporary Arts Center downtown called the Metropole, home to 207 low-income Section 8 tenants. 3CDC relocated these tenants, many to outlying neighborhoods, and turned the building into 21C, a modern art-themed luxury hotel.

The outlook for OTR's low-income residents mirrors the fate of those in East Austin as well as those in many other inner city areas.

Austin was once one of America's most affordable cities – it used to be a mecca for hippies and outlaws from Janis Joplin to Willie Nelson, all of them in search of what some said was cheap pot, cheap housing and free music.

Today Austin is bursting at the seams. Studies show it has some of the worst traffic gridlock in the nation. And, it also faces a bona fide affordable housing crisis.

Javier Amador lives in the southern part of East Austin on Santa Rita Street, in the neighborhood's Santa Rita Courts housing project. The development, one of the first federal affordable housing projects in the country when it was built in 1937, is one of a few dwindling options for low-income tenants looking to live in the city center. Amador relies on Santa Rita's location. As we chat in front of his apartment, the Frost Bank Tower and other downtown landmarks are visible in the distance.

Amador, 62, is on a fixed income due to disability, and has lived at Santa Rita for about seven years. "I enjoy it here," he says. "There's a place right down the road, I'm going to say a quarter mile—the Conley-Guerrero Senior Activity Center. I go there a lot. I also pay my electric bill and go grocery shopping right down the street. I like it." Statistically, Amador is one of fewer and fewer who can count on the conveniences of affordable housing like Santa Rita.

On the other side of the Courts, Elaine Sandoval, in her 50s, waters her garden, which she planted with her late boyfriend a decade ago upon arriving at Santa Rita. "When he passed away a few years ago," she says, sweeping her arm around the yard, chuckling, "he left me all this."

Red and yellow flowers lean against the fence, as if ready to converse with passers by. Rosemary and honeysuckle scent the air. Cacti dot the west side of the yard. They were planted by Sandoval's late partner, who had come to Austin from El Paso.

Like Amador, Sandoval says the realities of work and family life require she live near the center of Austin. What's more, she says, she's always enjoyed the community at the Courts, despite stereotypes about life in housing projects. She says neighbors look out for each other here, and that her grown daughters return often to visit those who have yet to leave.

"I wouldn't want to move—my roots are grown," Sandoval says.

Austin launched the first modern attempts at affordable housing with Santa Rita Courts, but is now becoming incredibly unaffordable. It's a relatively recent irony. Little more than a decade ago, it was one of the most affordable cities in the country. But a 2009 study conducted by the City of Austin Neighborhood Housing and Community Development department found that the Austin area has 44,700 renters earning less than \$20,000 a year. These residents had just 7,150 affordable units in the city from which to choose, a six-to-one ratio of renters to available units, translating to a 37,000-unit shortfall. Many of these renters once lived on the East Side.¹⁵

The study also shows that many low-income residents have been forced to seek housing outside the city, further from employment, government services, and social centers in areas where transportation options are more limited.

By 2020, an additional 12,500 rental units priced at \$425 per month or less will have to be developed to meet the growing number of low-income renters. Such an expansion would keep affordable-housing availability at its current level, not address the shortage that already exists.¹⁶

“The demand is just insane,” says Jo Ropaik, a program coordinator at the Texas State Affordable Housing Corporation. “There are going to be 80,000 new residents in the Austin area next year, and not all of them will be high-income. So by sheer numbers, demand is going to go up.”

Patricia Campbell, a spokesperson with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, says the increase in demand for affordable housing is an issue throughout the country. “Overall, I can say that nationally, because of the economic situation we’ve been in, there has been an increase in demand,” she says.

Amador has noted the changes in his neighborhood. He points to some recent high-rise apartments. “When I first got here,” he says, “the houses on the other side of the tracks weren’t even there. They built them and call them condominiums. Someone mentioned there would be affordable housing there, but I do not see it. It’s too fancy for ordinary folks to move in, too high.”

Across the country, a grand game of trading places is happening.

Cities like Washington, D.C. are seeing inner-city populations becoming whiter and more affluent. An April, 2013 article in *Next City*, a web-based urban affairs publication, discussed the changing face of the nation’s capital, which has “gained white residents big-time.” The article calls D.C. “a staggeringly divided city, with the highest income disparity in the country.” The article goes on to claim that ambitious

redevelopment projects are at the root of the economic and racial divides widening ever farther in D.C.

It's not just hyper-popular urban hotspots. In rustbelt cities like Pittsburgh, once-low income areas like East Liberty are seeing higher demand for housing and an increase in white, middle class residents.

East Liberty's black population is falling, while its white population has increased by 12 percent. Other census tracts in neighborhoods even closer to the city center have seen even more dramatic changes in demographics. One area just north of downtown saw a 38 percent decline in the black population and a whopping 370 percent increase in white population since 2000. In these areas, household incomes are also up between 20 and 40 percent.¹⁷

The shift is even happening in Oakland, California, where the black community was a majority for decades and represented a kind of wellspring of black culture. Between 2000 and 2010, Oakland saw a 25 percent drop in its black population as many moved to outlying areas. Meanwhile, the white population increased, especially in Oakland's downtown area. Today, Oakland's black and white populations are nearly even. While some celebrate the change as a triumph for integration, others see cause for concern, wondering if the trend will continue.¹⁸

“Who is living in these new apartment buildings?,” asks Nwamka Agbo, a blogger for the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, a non-profit advocating for low-income people, in a post on the Center's website. “Who is going to the new bars, or better yet, who is working at them? And who is making profit off of Oakland's growing downtown area?”

It's a question increasingly worth asking about inner city areas across the country. As America's interest in urban living wakes up from its sixty-year sleep, and as cities hustle to rebrand once-neglected and vilified areas to compete for young, technology and culture-savvy talent, long-established but ignored low-income communities are being uprooted.

Carmen Williams says a single long-stem red rose is buried outside her apartment building on Elder Street in the northern half of Over the Rhine.

“A friend who was doing the construction work, she put it in the concrete out under my window for my birthday. Me and her are probably the only two people who know it's there.”

It's a marker for Williams, a reminder of her connection to her community.

As she sits in Our Daily Bread, a social service agency just up the street from Williams' apartment, she recounts her 50 years in Cincinnati, where she “got stuck” after moving from Chicago. She's spent much of her time here in OTR.

“I think it's the people,” she says, explaining why she's stayed. “We have a nice rounded group of people. You gotta have kids, you gotta have young folks, you gotta have old folks, and you blend them all together and that's a nice family.”

Williams gestures over to a small pocket park midway down Elder Street, mentioning the weekly picnic she and other older residents of this part of OTR have there. She says things have been changing, though.

“It’s still a functioning community, but it’s scattered now,” she says. “Everyone that used to live here has to come back here just to be among friends sometimes, or have something to do or have somewhere to go. “

Williams’ voice starts rising, and she gestures south, toward the other side of Liberty. “They’re trying to set up for a whole different group of people who have a little money and work downtown and want to live close. But then, that’s not the friends and neighbors—the people who have made up the neighborhood.”

She says conveniences like grocery stores in walking distance, affordable restaurants, and places to wash her clothes are disappearing, replaced by empty buildings waiting to be refurbished, or, further south, by boutiques and fine dining.

“I try to keep calm,” she says, her voice softening again. “But it’s so frustrating. I guess I’m at the age now where I pay attention to what’s going on around me.” Williams is now barely audible. “And it’s not pretty at all.”

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