

Xavier University

Urban Academic Service

Learning Semester



October, 2010

Welcome to the Neighborhood



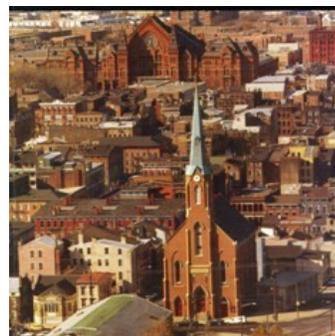
Located just miles away from Xavier's campus, Over-the-Rhine (OTR) is a dynamic area of Cincinnati. Often labeled as a violent urban area, we are learning there is much more here than the stereotype. Settled by Germans who named the area based on the canal's relationship to their home near the Rhine river, OTR has been a part of Cincinnati since 1802. Historically an immigrant neighborhood home to over 40,000 people, OTR dramatically changed with the end of Cincinnati's booming industrial era and prominence in tool manufacturing. After WWII, the neighborhood was

no longer known for its German culture and, with new housing policy, it became a place blacks were encouraged to settle and call home.

Now with only 7,000 inhabitants OTR is a place continuing to change rapidly while filled with assets, community, controversy, and poverty. This program puts us in the heart of OTR, combining our education in the classroom with engagement in the community through working with various social service agencies and projects in the neighborhood. Over this semester we will be questioning and learning about some prevalent development and social justice issues— this newsletter is the start of our thoughts and discoveries over this past month. Thanks for your interest in learning about OTR and breaking the stereotype.

Yours on Race Street—

Zach, Kaitlyn, Nick, and Owen



Keep Reading for:

- WHO WE ARE— BIOS, FUN FACTS
- BIGGER QUESTIONS, BIGGER ANSWERS
- A VACATION IF YOU WANT ONE
- REVITALIZATION WITHOUT GENTRIFICATION?
- IDENTITY CRISIS AND BEER

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For more information,
contact Dr. Irene B. Hodgson
at 745-3541 or hodgson@xavier.edu
or visit our website

http://xavier.edu/service_learning/

Who We Are and How That Fits Our Community

We all live in the era of Facebook. An era where we are all encouraged to market ourselves to our peers, and the amazing thing is - we *love* it! Most times, how we choose to market ourselves is a bit skewed towards the ideal “me.” We figured it would be important to introduce the human element into our biographies by including the good with the bad. Each bio is individualized by using each person’s own words for how they want to describe themselves. Based upon the quote, “you don’t really know someone until you live them,” we also chose to discuss in community our how we personally chose to market ourselves in order to gain a better understanding of ourselves as well as to market that better understanding to you, our reader.

The underlying purpose for attempting the most honest projection of ourselves is to demonstrate that it does not take a perfect soul to participate in this program, merely someone with a passion for engagement, a desire for first hand knowledge, and the willingness to step outside their “comfort zone.”



Kaitlyn Ernst

I’m a Junior double majoring in Political Science and Theology from South Bend, Indiana. With the Myers Briggs Personality Test, I found my ENTJ type is a pretty close fit- I’m a level headed thinker and compassionate, but I can tend to be a people pleaser. I was drawn to this program after recently working with the foster care system in my home town—the exposure gave me a strong desire for engagement in my community as an active member, working in it and learning from it. My career thoughts are all over the place, bouncing from law to education to social work, but my main goal will be children’s advocacy.

Zach Aliberti

I am a 19 year old who does not feel, physically or mentally, his age. Philosophy, Politics, and the Public is my major. I am terribly interested in community and plan on tying my studies at Xavier into community planning, organizing, development, and advocacy work in the future.

Growing up in Louisville, KY has somehow shaped me into an INTJ. I am introspective and enjoy putting myself in someone else’s shoes, but I can often be a very critical person and tend to voice these critiques openly. The core philosophy that drives me: unconscious action will be the death of us all.

This program is a way for me to bring theory and practice together as well as to live in a social structure I was not born into.

This experience is shaping my identity by expanding what I can identify with and I dig it.

Owen Raisch

If you ask:

I’ll shyly admit to being a PPP major (Philosophy, Politics, and the Public), then argue that the Psychology double, makes me a more friendly guy. In fact, the internet tells me that I’m a sort of personable pedagogue addicted to changing you and everything else — which is true.

ASLS is a program that fits my utilitarian persona; I’m partially using it to help me understand the facts about urban living and the impact of economics on the world. Else wise, I’m trying to understand people and how to support them; my dream is to open a business and love the world.

Nick Pease

Hello...

I’m a sophomore biology major from Nashville and apparently I have an ENTJ personality type. My strong point is cleaning dishes, while my weak point is cooking (Zach doesn't like my beans and weenies dish). I chose to do this program for a chance to be engaged in a unique community through learning the dynamics of the community while also serving those in need. As for a career, I would love to go into the medical field, possibly as a public health physician.

Julia and Christine

The group is not complete without these two- Julia Alexander, a graduate of Xavier and the Urban semester, is our assistant group leader. Living in the apartment above us, she’s here to help us in our daily questioning of our surroundings. Usually joining us for dinner and always game for Owen’s pizza, Julia is a great support system while continuing to challenge our thoughts and assumptions.

Dr. Christine Anderson is the faculty trip leader and she also teaches our Service Learning class. Dr. Anderson brings us together for a lively discussion on the week’s events, our service sites, and how what challenges we are facing along our learning experience.

Bigger Questions, Bigger Answers

By: Kaitlyn Ernst

I am being spoiled living two blocks from a farmers' market with everything locally grown from apples to zucchini and even authentic Greek gyros. Findlay Market is a popular destination, packed on Saturday mornings, full of great shops and friendly faces. When asked if they've been to Over-the-Rhine, most people will answer, "Yes, I've been to Findlay." But traveling out of Findlay, past its parking lot, it has almost a completely different feel. The walk back to our apartment is the environment that generates the stereotypes and questions the four of us get often - "Why are you living down there?" (in that confused, almost disapproving, worried voice).

The answer is something we've been talking about a lot, trying to formulate an articulate response, because it's often a mess of emotions and thoughts that have only become more confused in this past month we've spent here. The idea of community is the main reason I was attracted to this semester. I love the dynamics found among families and friends and amplified within cities, among businesses and customers, and neighbors talking on the streets. That life is so vibrant in OTR. Its eclectic mix of individuals

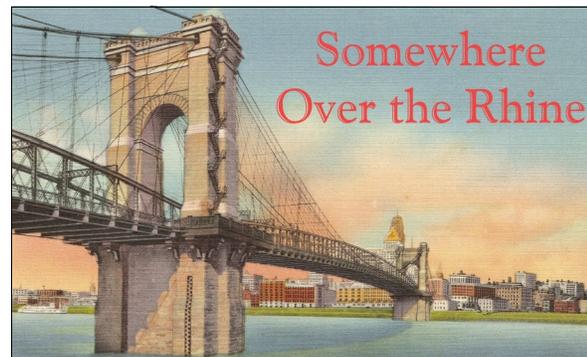
and opportunities generate a sense of vitality that clashes with the area's rampant poverty and pressing social justice issues.

The clash begins outside our front door. How can our neighbors find jobs and affordable housing? Is the development of new, pricey lofts pushing the poor out of the area or generating revenue and renewal here? Is the 47 million dollar renovation of Washington Park going to include the park's current population of poor and homeless or cast them aside for a hoped future of "progress"? How do we define progress?

We deal with these difficult issues the only way possible- with lots of discussion. Dialogue around the dinner table, and while hanging around the apartment, revolves around this conflict we're seeing - the abundant homelessness, construction done by development-company 3CDC, the potential the area has. Balancing these difficult ideas and the identity of being college students is really hard to deal with, but we're coping. Whether it's talking about our day at work or singing along to some Dave Matthews, Zach, Owen, Nick

and I are taking each day in stride. Living in OTR is definitely a challenge, but it's one we welcome. We're here to learn, engage, and live in this community that has so much to offer, defying stereotypes and its bad reputation.

Over the next few months OTR will change dramatically with the duel between development and civil rights - we'll be watching and absorbing, welcoming thoughts and opinions and learning from each encounter as we continue this process of not just coping, but growing.



A Vacation if You Want One

By: Zach Aliberti



"The community is filled with people who know each other, watch out for each other, and take the time to acknowledge strangers."

Living in Over-the-Rhine (OTR) feels like a vacation, a vacation in the sense of moving off the "grid." By immersing myself within the community here in OTR, I have successfully pulled out of the Xavier community, and I am widely seen as inaccessible by my friends and family. The image of me as inaccessible is partly because people view OTR as an undesirable place to be as well as the fact that I no longer have my cell phone, my laptop, or a car. So in essence I am on vacation. I have removed myself from the daily grind of my previous routine and am not easily accessible by traditional means of communication.

Although I am more than able to see this experience as a vacation from my old lifestyle at Xavier, I do not lack commitment here in OTR as I might if I were on vacation in a place like the Riviera. Without a car, I am required to ride the bus and walk everywhere the bus doesn't go. On my walks I see poverty, pain, substance abuse, gambling, and get undesirable attention. There is Findlay Market or a limited Kroger to get food from. The

community I live in has people society labels as undesirable to be around, and the fact is that these people define themselves by their social label. My classes are on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday. The rest of the week I spend my time engaging with the undesirable, unwanted, and dangerous community of OTR.

The lifestyle painted weighs heavy in comparison to the privileged bubble of the Xavier community that I have escaped. In light of the publicized description of OTR, one might ask how the lifestyle in OTR could be viewed as a vacation, when it is not as easy, happy, and positive as a place like the Riviera or even the Xavier Community. I would like to tell the person who asks that about a community people don't often hear of. A place where there are a plethora of artists and art venues as well as two renowned art schools; a community full of housing stock that is historical, renovated, vacant, and occupied; a business district that encompasses local and corporate tastes as well as a great number of local street vendors. The community is filled with people who

know each other, watch out for each other, and take the time to acknowledge strangers. There is music on every street, advocacy groups for the people who lack a voice and homes for people who lack a home. There are people with plenty of time - which in itself can be seen as a rarity - to devote to whatever opportunity comes their way. There are a total of five community gardens, plenty of kids, a park with hundreds of visitors a day, and a farmers market with a history of rich culture and local service.

If I were to explain the positive community of OTR, my listener would be more than happy, possibly even excited, to visit such a place. But, the reality is that no one ever hears of this positive community. People only hear of the dangerous, violent, drug, and homeless infested community.

With all this said, I wonder what the view of OTR's assets would do for the community and its members. To contrast the implications of viewing OTR's assets against a view of OTR's deficits may be helpful. Let's begin with the deficit view-

which instills: fear, distaste, pity, compassion, hate, neglect, violence, stereotypes, aggression, and a community of people who get defined by these defects and even worse, form their identity by embodying the negative characteristics of their community. I could only imagine the implications of viewing OTR and its inhabitants' inherent assets: hope, pride, peace, support, strength, collaboration, civic investment, happiness?

What I would like to point out is that all this talk of OTR as a wonderful place is no more negligent or naïve than talking of OTR as a place to be feared. The major difference is that viewing OTR as a desirable place has benefits that can reach us all. Whereas, our traditional

practice of isolating and marginalizing the “problem” that is OTR only perpetuates the problems of OTR, not only for the community but for its inhabitants as well. I challenge the community of Greater Cincinnati to see the real OTR: the community which has a great deal of assets to be accessed and mobilized as well as a number of immediate deficits to be addressed along the way. The negatives can make seeing the positives more challenging but if this is how we lived our own lives (by seeing the negatives and not the positives), I don't believe we would be the functioning individuals we are today. The key to our success is taking the good with the bad and using each to move us forward.



“There remains an important aspect that has been promptly blanketed –the displacement of current residents.”

Revitalization without Gentrification?

By: Nick Pease

“The NEW Over-the-Rhine”. This was the bold, stimulating title of Cincinnati Magazine exactly one year ago. The title was, undoubtedly, initiated by the new building renovations on Race, Vine and Main, three streets that are dripping with character and potential. Beautiful condos, hipster bars, cozy cafes, art shops and other retail units are quickly accumulating and igniting the “revitalization” of Over-the-Rhine. Someone can easily be invigorated by the “changes” that have begun to transform one of the “most beautiful, historic neighborhoods in Cincinnati.” So who is the mastermind behind the majestic

renovation? One of the many organizations, 3CDC (the Cincinnati City Center Development Corporation), has asserted itself as the prime component of the movement. This revitalization of the whole city began in 2003 when Charlie Luken, the mayor at the time, and the Cincinnati corporate community were encouraged by the Cincinnati Economic Development Task Force to reunite the city. Shortly after, a plan was created to redevelop and connect the central business district to the Fountain Square and Fountain Square to the Over-the-Rhine district. While gaining the corporate sponsorship of Proctor and Gamble, PNC Bank, US Bank,

Kroger, Macy's Toyota, and Duke Energy and accepting the Cincinnati New Markets Fund and Cincinnati Equity Fund, 3CDC was able to construct a 48.9 million dollar makeover of Fountain Square, bringing a new excitement to the city through public festivals and entertainment for diverse crowds. However, 3CDC's newest movement has focused on a “renaissance of OTR”.

While this may sound like an enticing movement for the betterment of the city, the subsequent consequences should be reviewed cautiously. There remains an important aspect of neighborhood renovations on the terms of the city—the



displacement of current residents. This tragedy has been smothered by the city's concern that the "troubles" of Over-the-Rhine were "spilling into the business district." While nobody will rebut that Cincinnatians want a comfortable, safe city to live and work in, the means of promoting this ideal city should be ethically executed.

3CDC, prodded by the city, has begun a remedy for the "troubles of the city" by starting in Over-the-Rhine. First step, purchase abandon buildings; second, purchase "nuisance properties" like carryout liquor stores; third, redevelop housing for mixed use home ownership – that is mixed use, not mixed income housing.

About 70 million dollars have already been invested in the first two phases 3CDC's revitalization of Over-the-Rhine. These investments have given birth to 200 new condo units and several blocks of retail units. In



recognizing that Over the Rhine area is "coveted by corporations that serve our region", an urgent effort to provide newer and more appealing housing units has begun. These "corporations" whose "service" to the community seems unidentifiable, have paved the way for the art, business and entertainment districts to expand into Over the Rhine. With these expansions, housing has been a main focus of 3CDC. But who are these new housing units for? Who will have economic accessibility to these? So far, the average condo of current 3CDC developed projects is \$183,000 –drastically limiting the current residents' housing opportunities considering the median annual income for current residents is less than \$10,000. In response to this, many will say, "We all care about the poor and want social services to take care of them, but just wish they were somewhere else. Aren't there better places for them to live, just not in 'our' nice historic district?" Does this not seem ironic considering

the district was essentially abandoned by middle class whites in the 1960's as the white flight caused a 50% decrease in population by the beginning of the 1970's? However, now that the city "cares", and the middle to upper class wants to live here, they are ready to revitalize at the cost of potentially displacing current lower income residents through a process that sounds frighteningly similar to gentrification – a term used to describe the influx of wealthier people into recently renovated deteriorated areas, often forcing poorer current residents to move. How should Cincinnati renovate and remedy the issues of Over-the-Rhine? By displacing present residents and further ignoring those who are in need of the most care? Or should there be time and money spent on both spurring new attractive development while also providing more opportunities to help the struggling individuals of Over-the-Rhine? Displacing low income housing and the homeless would require moving social services, but which district is willing to take these responsibilities? By setting up a new community project for low income households, further isolating the marginalized as some propose, the impoverished are only brushed under the rug, allowing crime, poverty, and suffering to breed and propagate with even fewer social opportunities that the current location offers. These issues would soon spill out into other districts, and the whole process would repeat itself.

Hopefully, for the sake of moral and ethical change, a strong effort to preserve and promote the living conditions of present residents needs to be enhanced as the Over-the-Rhine Community Housing has been doing since the late 1970's. Not to discredit work of 3CDC, which has produced a beautiful urban environment that will undoubtedly enhance the Cincinnati experience, but the city should be cautious about revitalizing to the point of gentrification. Can there not be a comprehensive plan that enhances the environment for present and future residents? Ideally, it would be nice to see a healthy balance of 3CDC and OTRCH working collaboratively so that, even as new development spreads, current residents will be provided with affordable housing instead of being displaced in favor of the city's economic sustainability that reaps the profits at the expense of other's homes and lives.

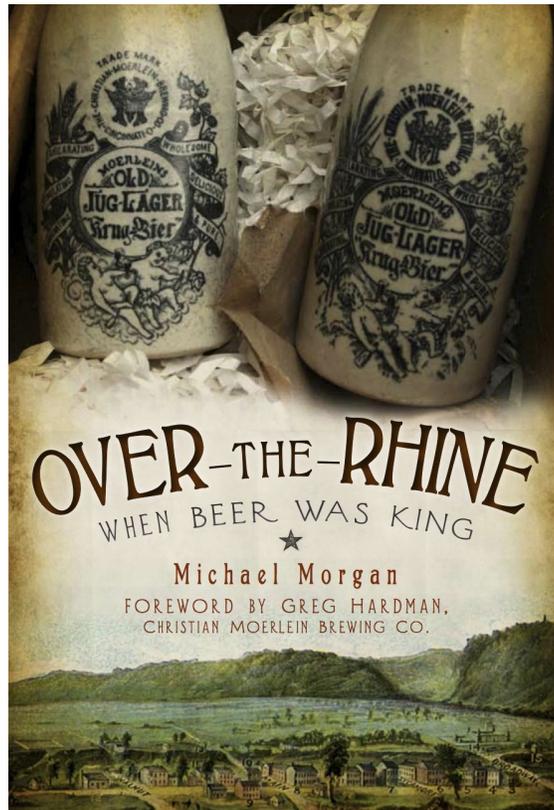
Identity Crisis and BEER – Owen D. Ratsch

Over-the-Rhine is a tad famous in the states; in fact, you've probably heard it mentioned on the news. But I have an issue with the way you've come to understand our lively 'hood. What upsets me is that when you think Over-the-Rhine, I'll guess you think of violence rather than beer.

BEER? Now that I've read your mind, I'd like to expand it. You really don't know why Over-the-Rhine rests atop the peel of an orange (give it a second), because you haven't thought to realize that the Rhine is a river passing through Germany. It would be nice if I were wrong in this prediction, but the odds are pretty much mine. The truth is that no one really knows what OTR is, because OTR is experiencing an identity crisis. Three hundred years ago, the land was Shawnee territory and home to trees and deer; two hundred years ago, it was the outer edge of what we call Cincinnati and still home to trees and deer; between 1850 and 1990 (that's 140 yrs.), Over-the-Rhine went from being a German brewing grounds to an Appalachian gateway to an African-American ghetto. OTR is now in the middle of its fourth transition in 150 years and no one has any idea who Over-the-Rhine really is, not even the yuppies coming here now.

Cincinnati once had a surprisingly potent economy, a machine fueled by alcohol. In fact, by the 1890's the value of whiskey and beer exports exceeded that of livestock by nearly \$9,000,000, boasting a value of about 39.5 million dollars. There were more than 1,900 saloons in the city, and most alcoholic production took place in a neighborhood known for its concentrated German population. This unique community was located right across the Miami Erie Canal from downtown Cincinnati, and it was known well for the use of English as a second language. In fact, this neighborhood was so markedly German that crossing the canal into it was referred to as crossing "over the Rhine," Germany's well-known waterway.

At this point, OTR had a distinct culture and everything from its architecture to the daily papers clearly reflected the market and times. But a strong identity can only last so long here; with the 1920's came Prohibition, legislation that local author Michael Morgan claims "killed Over-the-Rhine, with a knife right to its heart, the beer industry." Mr. Morgan is undoubtedly correct, in my sober opinion. Prohibition forced more than a thousand saloons to



close, ruined the market for everything from bowling alleys to distinguished distilleries, and left nothing to stand but the negatives of urban living.

However, the anti-alcohol movement did not single-handedly destroy Over-the-Rhine, there was an anti-German movement as well. One example of this radical sentiment is provided by the Know-Nothing jacking of OTR votes during the 1855 elections (a xenophobic event). By the end of the debacle, German men were dead or injured by everything from a canon firing randomly down Sycamore Street to deliberate beatings and murders of business owners and their saloons.

Combine such hysteria with the overall nasty conditions of our immigrant neighborhood and you get mass migration. By the 1960's, dirty water, cramped living, and some revitalization efforts oversaw the replacement of OTR's first "American" inhabitants by an Appalachian population. In search of work during an economic boon, white migrants flocked to Cincinnati in hopes of finding work, but their time here would be even more limited than that of previous inhabitants.

Work to install the Mill Creek Expressway throughout the 50's and 60's next forced much of Cincinnati's African-American population into Over-the-Rhine. After some race riots and general bickering went down, the whites left (84% by 1980). The third neighborhood inhabitants gained a reputation for violence and replaced the long-gone nickname of OTR as the "Beer Capital of the World" with one less appealing, "Most Dangerous Neighborhood in the United States." Let me interject with an argument that the latter label of 2006 was significantly overblown but generally accepted by the media, nonetheless.

These general changes ought to be likened to some kind of chaos, and even over the last 100 years in OTR, nothing has remained constant but a general sense of poverty. With the violent history and outdated housing (278 buildings deemed uninhabitable in 2001), most people did move away from Over-the-Rhine but those incapable of doing so. Fortunately, however, the neighborhood avoids even the ghost-town identity as a surprising sense of community has remained.

What I am currently witnessing is a battle over the right to OTR. According to exaggerated accounts, the nefarious white capitalist longs to displace everyone lacking Gucci attire, while bleeding-heart radicals would love to establish a "super ghetto" stronghold; other citizens would be perfectly happy re-opening historic breweries and drinking some beer. Each of these parties tries to claim ownership over my community and implicitly cites the "true identity" of Over-the-Rhine. I'm arguing that no one really has much of a claim to this place at all.

What ought to end is the tomfoolery and what ought to take its place is some talk of the turkey. I'd like to see straightforward discussion on the rights of OTR's current inhabitants mixed with a little regard for the well-being of Cincinnati's struggling economy; an admission that more is at stake than hell-bent motivations would do us all some good. The people to hold accountable are developers like 3CDC, activists like Cincinnati's Coalition for the Homeless, and the invisible government of Over-the-Rhine (Cincinnati). Before any more decisions are myopically made and while it's largely too late, public dialogue must take place - maybe over a couple bottles of the local brew.