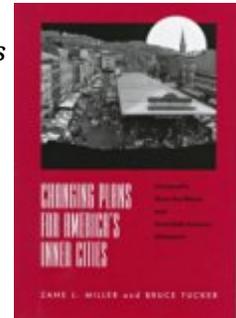


Zane L. Miller, Bruce Tucker. *Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities: Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine and Twentieth-Century Urbanism.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998. xxi + 227 pp. \$21.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8142-0762-8.



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In *Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities*, Zane Miller, the author of many great works of American urban history, and Bruce Tucker, an historian at the University of Windsor, have collaborated to tell a tale in turn comic and tragic, but always instructive, about redevelopment planning in Cincinnati.

The subject of *Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities* is the Cincinnati neighborhood called Over-the-Rhine. Over-the-Rhine grew in the mid-nineteenth century as a middle-class suburban-style neighborhood which attracted mainly German immigrants. By the turn of the century, Over-the-Rhine had evolved into Cincinnati's gaudy entertainment district with saloons, burlesque halls, and gambling dens. In the early twentieth century, Over-the-Rhine had become a polyglot inner-city slum for immigrants and native-born Americans. From the 1940s onwards, poor whites—many of whom came from the Appalachian region—and African-Americans moved to the area. For much of the century, Over-the-Rhine gradually lost population but after 1960, the rate of decline accelerated dramatically. The neighborhood which at the

turn of the century was home to forty-four thousand residents contained fewer than ten thousand people by 1990.

For much of the twentieth century, Cincinnati's planners oscillated between the hope that the slums would go away by themselves and the belief that radical surgery was necessary to get rid of them. In the early years, they theorized that planned growth in outlying areas and the natural expansion of downtown commerce and industry into the deteriorated inner-city would solve the problem of the slums of the West End—where most of the city's African-American population resided—and the adjacent Over-the-Rhine district. In the 1930s, the city's planning commission proposed a more dramatic solution: the razing of one hundred forty-five blocks and replacing them with sixteen superblocks of housing projects. This scheme was never realized, and instead the city carried out a smaller slum clearance plan which produced two mundane-looking public housing projects.

Cincinnati Metropolitan Master Plan of 1948 revived the idea of inner-city redevelopment

through massive slum clearance, this time to make way for new factories, residences, and expressways. In accord with the liberal sentiments of the city's director of redevelopment, the ambitious plan coupled with a ban on racial discrimination in redevelopment projects. The result was that the plan ran into two-pronged local opposition: first from West End blacks who feared losing their homes and second from whites who feared the introduction of poor blacks into previously white neighborhoods. The planning commission responded by retreating from an aggressive integration agenda and instead focusing redevelopment on less controversial non-residential areas within the central business district. As a result, Over-the-Rhine escaped the wreckers' ball and was slated to become a residential area, either mixed-income or upper-middle class, to serve the downtown.

In 1950s, the city planners focused on preventing the expansion of the new postwar African-American ghetto and its deterioration into a poverty zone. The planners also introduced new approaches to planning by consulting with neighborhood residents--in contrast to the earlier top-down style of planning by experts and officials--and emphasizing preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings. The Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, with its quaint nineteenth-century buildings, was now seen as a potential treasure which, if properly preserved, would help lure middle-class suburbanites back to live and shop in the city.

In the 1960s, racial and ethnic consciousness began to influence urban planning. In the African-American West End district, opposition to a proposed baseball stadium and political assertiveness inspired by the civil rights movement led local leaders to draw up a multi-faceted community plan that included housing, shops, businesses, social service agencies, and cultural institutions. Although the city council and HUD ap-

proved the plan, a cutback in available federal funds thwarted the effort.

Nonetheless, the West End plan established a precedent for indigenously planned ethnic redevelopment. In Over-the-Rhine, community advocates pressed for redevelopment with an Appalachian theme in order to help the poor whites who lived there. By 1974, this effort had collapsed mainly because there were not enough people with Appalachian roots, even after the plan's proponents included local African-Americans as "Appalachians."

During the 1970s, planning for Over-the-Rhine developed the schizophrenic and rancorous qualities which would stymie every serious attempt at redevelopment for the next twenty-five years. One approach to planning the neighborhood, first expressed in the city's 1971 plan for the Model Cities program, envisioned Over-the-Rhine as a district of poor people and emphasized organizing and providing social services to the disadvantaged residents. The alternative, embodied in a proposal of the city's Department of Urban Development, relied upon historic preservation, beginning with a mid-nineteenth-century open-air market, to make Over-the-Rhine into a chic neighborhood that would house a racially and socio-economically mixed population.

Supporters of these contrasting planning strategies visions now battled bitterly for the future of Over-the-Rhine. The vision for a heterogeneous and historic neighborhood found support among city agency officials, local businesspersons, historic preservationists, and middle-class residents. In a series of tough guerrilla campaigns, they were attacked by neighborhood activists, led by Buddy Gray, the director of the Drop-Inn Shelter, which offered food, clothing, and shelter to alcoholics and homeless people. Gray and his allies put their opponents on the defensive by claiming that historic preservation would uproot defenseless poor people (an argument which ignored the neighborhood's rapidly dwindling population).

The activists exploited the political process by seizing control of the neighborhood council and insisting to government agencies that only they could speak for the neighborhood.

Many long political battles ensued. When the city proposed designating the area as a National Historic District, the activists fought long and hard to prevent the designation. Although they were unable to stop the historic designation which came in 1985, the activists not only delayed it for years, but also convinced city officials to make low-income housing the primary, and for practical purposes the only, goal for the neighborhood.

According to Miller and Tucker, the Over-the-Rhine activists articulated a "separatist" approach to neighborhood planning, which the authors find ironic since Gray was a white man from an educated middle-class background who appointed himself the leader of the extremely poor and predominantly African-American residents who remained in the area. Nonetheless, Gray fiercely attacked the motives of any who wished to integrate the very poor into broader society and championed the right of the residents to go to bars and live the vagrant and alcohol-related life style he felt they preferred.

Gray's attitude toward his neighbors' behaviors apparently led to tragic consequences. In 1996, a former resident of the Drop Inn Shelter whom Gray had befriended and who had a long history of mental illness and criminal behavior murdered Gray. The national press declared Gray a hero and interpreted his murder as a setback for the cause of the homeless. Yet Gray's murder also highlighted the high crime rate in Over-the-Rhine and brought into question Gray's benign assumptions about the life of the poor there.

Miller and Tucker place the planning history of Over-the-Rhine in the context of changing concepts of community and urbanism, which I can only attempt to summarize here. In the 1920s and 30s, according to the authors, planners took a cos-

mopolitan approach to planning the city. Influenced by social and biological determinism, they believed in building a system of "competent communities"--socially and functionally homogeneous districts--throughout the city which would allow low-income and outsider groups to advance up the social ladder. The planners thus advocated the sorting of land uses and population groups by such means as zoning.

In the 1950s, the authors argue, planners followed the intellectual revolt against determinism and adopted "cultural individualism" a belief that individuals would and should choose their own identities and ways of life. This shift in thinking, Miller and Tucker conclude, opened the door to extremes of identity politics and grass-roots participation. In the process, the all-encompassing community vision of the early planning era was lost the comprehensive planning vision expressed in early redevelopment plans is reduced to a narrow view that simply counts units of low-income housing.

This analysis, as presented in *Changing Plans* and other works by Miller, is rich and complex, and although its connection to the Over-the-Rhine planning battles is implicit rather than explicit, ultimately persuasive.

Yet even if the notion of the good of the whole has been lost, I believe, and I think the authors would acknowledge, that earlier modes of planning also had shortcomings. The early twentieth-century exponents of housing and planning were often paternalistic and sometimes, as in the case of Lawrence Veiller who believed only building codes could cure bad housing, too single-minded. Generations of twentieth-century urban planners pushed forward slum clearance schemes, but in the process destroyed vital communities along with deteriorated housing. The reliance on experts, a legacy of the Progressive era to New Deal and postwar planners, created top-down authority structures which allowed bureaucrats to carry out policies that were detrimental to the local citi-

zenry, particularly if they were poor or belonged to a racial minority.

One might also argue that zoning, an important planning tool invented in the early planning era, has contributed to the narrow politics of self-interest. Zoning--popularized and defended by Cincinnati planner Alfred Bettman--has given working- and middle-class communities exclusionary powers that once only the wealthy enjoyed. It has thereby encouraged the socio-economic segregation which early planners advocated. As in other cities, Cincinnati's neighborhoods and suburbs used zoning and other tools to protect what residents perceived as the "quality of life" and segregate the populace by wealth and race. In the process, Over-the-Rhine, with its dwindling and increasingly impoverished population was left to its own devices. Self-appointed advocates of Over-the-Rhine's poor residents then hijacked the planning agenda for the neighborhood.

The authors of *Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities* would probably argue that the sins of earlier generations do not excuse today's planners from retaining the valuable lessons from the past. In particular, Miller and Tucker insist, planners must consider how to make the component parts of the urbs fit together for the good of the entire community. I believe that readers of this deeply-felt and thought-provoking work will agree.

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