

Amy Wainwright and Michelle Millet

Social justice, history, and inequity in Cleveland

An overview

When we first volunteered to be on the Local Arrangements Committee for the ACRL 2019 conference, and to write this specific piece for our colleagues who were coming to our city, neither of us had a clue that the entire third season of the true crime podcast *Serial*¹ would focus on the criminal justice system of Cuyahoga County. But since it was so popular, we considered it a good framing device for a discussion about social justice in Cleveland.

If you haven't listened to *Serial*, the short version is Cleveland and Cuyahoga County's criminal and juvenile justice system are shining examples of the inequity that exists in the region. Poverty, segregation, violence, food deserts, crime, and an unfair justice system are all parts of the larger system that remains unjust and unequal in the heart of a Rust Belt city desperate to rise again.

Cleveland's been in the news a lot in the past few years, thanks in part to the Republican National Convention in 2016. Much of the press coverage is rather glowing. Cleveland has a growing foodie and craft beer scene, increasing technology jobs, excellent higher education, museums, professional sports teams, medical jobs, *and* it's affordable. But while there is definitely a resurgence taking place, there are still pockets of Cleveland that are not thriving.



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Like many Rust Belt cities, Cleveland suffered greatly as factory jobs left, unemployment skyrocketed, and the economy tanked. Then the housing crisis in 2007 took what were pockets of prosperity and decimated them. Foreclosures and abandoned properties covered impoverished neighborhoods throughout the inner city. Now, as prosperity comes back to

downtown and to some surrounding neighborhoods, they become an even starker contrast to other areas (especially on the east side), including

the Hough neighborhood, the city of East Cleveland, the Buckeye-Woodland neighborhood, and the Glenville neighborhood.

Recent press concerning Cleveland includes a report from federal marshals noting that the Cuyahoga County jails are so deficient² that they put staff and inmates at risk, and the rate of inmate suicide is rising. The police in the city of Cleveland are still under a federal consent decree due to the use of excessive force.³ Recent years have seen high-profile shootings by police of blacks, including

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12-year-old Tamir Rice.⁴ Despite these realities, Cleveland has a long history of social justice activism which continues today.

An Underground Railroad connection

Cleveland sits at the intersection of the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie and was founded in 1796 by Moses Cleaveland, on behalf of Connecticut's Western Reserve. Throughout Cleveland's history, the citizens of North East Ohio have shown their passion for social justice issues. In the years leading up to the Civil War, Cleveland was a key stop on the Underground Railroad. As the last major city stationed on Lake Erie, escaping slaves could flee to Canada. Cleveland was home to many groups of abolitionists and activists working through religious, business, and community connections to aid the anti-slavery movement.

During your visit to Cleveland, visit St. John's Episcopal Church, the Cozad-Bates House,⁵ and other prominent historical landmarks. For information about these local landmarks, virtually visit Cleveland Historical's webtour, "In Search of the Underground Railroad."⁶

Cleveland continues to celebrate the history of the Underground Railroad through an annual event titled Station Hope⁷—a reference to the code name for St. John's Episcopal Church. This evening of theater, performance, and dance will be held May 4, 2019.

For those of you in Chicagoland, prominent Chicago artist Dawoud Bey recently photographed in Cleveland as part of the FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial exhibition.⁸ The complete series will be on display at the Art Institute of Chicago from January 11 through April 14, 2019, in the exhibition titled, "Night Coming Tenderly, Black."⁹

The 1960s in Cleveland

Throughout the 1960s, Cleveland was fraught with civil rights clashes, mirroring the state of unrest throughout the country. Change and growth in the city of Cleveland led to population shifts, which contributed to racial tensions. The tensions in Cleveland

most often blossomed in poor neighborhoods, and throughout the 1960s, African Americans in particular expressed their need for equality, pushing back on the systemic problems.

In 1966, the Hough neighborhood¹⁰ on Cleveland's east side was one of the first areas to reflect the nation's civil rights struggles. White business owners and long-time residents of Hough did not immediately adapt to the new black families, which resulted in a conflict at the Seventy Niner's Cafe. Black neighbors gathered near the cafe¹¹ to protest discrimination, and when the police were called, violence between civilians and police resulted. Riots in Hough lasted for five days. Four black residents died, many were injured, and there was over \$1 million worth of damage.

In 1968, the Glenville shootout,¹² named after the location of the neighborhood where a confrontation between police and the Black Nationalists of New Libya occurred. Glenville, like Hough, is a mostly black east side neighborhood that became another stepping stone of the civil rights fight. Although the story has different perspectives, it appears that police took out racially fueled anger on neighborhood residents, whether they were involved with the nationalists or not.

Through the lens of the history of the Civil Rights era, Hough and Glenville have come to be seen as a part of the parallel story of community strength and social justice focus. These neighborhoods and other areas, including the city of East Cleveland, are still struggling to fight through setbacks. To read more about segregation, social justice, and African American history in Cleveland, follow a webtour from Cleveland Historical¹³ or watch a lecture¹⁴ about Cleveland, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and the 1960s.

Poverty and food deserts

Access to fresh foods is a piece of the equity and justice conversation that has attracted much attention as of late. Neighborhoods and populations without fresh food are often the unhealthiest. The pervasive exist-

tence of food deserts throughout the areas with the most poverty in Cleveland contribute to the systems of social inequality.

Take a ride through the east side neighborhoods and you will have a hard time finding a full-service grocery store, though Dave's, a family-owned regional chain, does attempt to provide groceries in as many neighborhoods with access to public transportation. Other large Cleveland-area chains have closed stores or only build in more affluent parts of the city and suburbs.

The most recent Cuyahoga County Community Food Assessment plan¹⁵ noted two startling statistics: about 50% of all Cleveland residents, and 25% of all Cuyahoga County residents, live in a food desert. Of the Cleveland residents living in a food desert, 60% describe themselves as "non-white."

In order to alleviate the stress on local food banks and fill gaps in accessibility to fresh produce, Cleveland continues a long tradition of public and urban farming. The city's local urban farms¹⁶ are home to knowledgeable folks who would like to pass on gardening tricks while giving service to their communities. Listen to a collection of stories about Cleveland's urban farming tradition from Cleveland Growing Strong.¹⁷

Answering the call for social justice

While the picture we lay out here might seem to be bleak, there are a lot of organizations that are working to respond with an equity and justice goal. We'd like to highlight a few organizations and businesses that contribute to that cause.

- **Empowering Youth, Exploring Justice.** This Cleveland nonprofit focuses on giving young people the tools to express themselves through healthy dialogue, creating networks of support for teens, and leadership education to build self confidence.

- **Social Justice Institute at Case Western Reserve University.** Located at Case Western Reserve University in the University Circle neighborhood of Cleveland, the Social Justice Institute is home to educational tools

and resources, lectures and discussion-focused events, and scholars who research fields related to social justice issues. Shortly after the conclusion of the ACRL 2019 conference, the institute will host its final event of the season titled, "Using Photovoice to Capture Diverse Experiences of Cleveland's Opioid Crisis," April 16, 2019.

- **Tamir Rice Foundation.** While there is not an official website or physical home to the Tamir Rice Foundation, both are in the works. Samaria Rice, Tamir's mother, is active in her community and in pushing for police reform. Groundbreaking for the Tamir Rice Afrocentric Center is scheduled for 2019 and will be home to programming and arts for children.

Additionally, we would love for you to visit either of these establishments that actively promote social justice through their businesses.

- **EDWINS Leadership and Restaurant Institute.** Brandon Chrostowski, founder and CEO of EDWINS,¹⁸ started his fine dining training and restaurant to break the circle that leads people back to prison. Formerly incarcerated adults get a six-month training in the hospitality industry and access to employment, legal aid, medical care, clothing, job training, literacy programs, and housing. This program began in 2012 and boasts 95% employment after graduation and 1.4% recidivism. Chrostowski recently opened the EDWINS Butcher Shop, a couple of blocks from the restaurant, adjacent to the EDWINS Second Chance Life Skills Center. It's the first fresh meat vendor in the Buckeye-Woodland neighborhood in 50 years. EDWINS is in Shaker Square.

- **Chateau Hough.** Chateau Hough¹⁹ is an urban winery in the Hough neighborhood. Founded by Mansfield Frazier, the winery employs parolees from a local halfway house. Frazier began building the winery in 2007 and added a biocellar recently. The vineyard and biocellar accommodates visitors by appointment only.

We hope we've provided some background information for you to enjoy Cleveland and the ACRL 2019 conference, appreciate

some of the city's history, and understand its continued struggles. There are, no doubt, wonderful organizations and work being done in Cleveland that we didn't get to in this short piece, but we hope we gave you an honest introduction to the real tensions and inequities that exist in our wonderful city.

Notes

1. Sarah Koenig, *Serial: Season 3*, directed/performed by Sarah Koenig (2018; Chicago: "This American Life" and WBEZ Chicago, 2018), podcast audio.

2. Nick Castele, and Matt Richmond, "U.S. Marshals Say Cuyahoga County Jail Puts Staff And Inmates At Risk," *Ideastream*, aired November 21, 2018, on 90.3 WCPN, <https://www.ideastream.org/news/us-marshals-say-cuyahoga-county-jail-puts-staff-and-inmates-at-risk>.

3. United States Justice Department and City of Cleveland, Division of Police, 2018, Documents pertaining to agreement, <http://www.city.cleveland.oh.us/CityofCleveland/Home/Government/CityAgencies/PublicSafety/Police/PoliceSettlementAgreement>.

4. Laura Westbrook, "Tamir Rice Shot 'within two seconds of police arrival,'" November 27, 2014, *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-30220700/tamir-rice-shot-within-two-seconds-of-police-arrival>.

5. University Circle, Inc. Cozad-Bates House, <https://www.universitycircle.org/destinations/cozad-bates-house>.

6. CSU Center for Public History + Digital Humanities, "In Search of the Underground Railroad," *Cleveland Historical*, 2019, <https://clevelandhistorical.org/tours/show/44>.

7. Cleveland Public Theatre, to be performed May 4, 2019, <https://www.cptonline.org/station-hope/>.

8. Dawoud Bay, "Night Coming Tenderly, Black," 2017, commissioned by FRONT International, installation at St. John's Church, Cleveland, 2018. <https://frontart.org/artists/dawoud-bey/>.

9. Dawoud Bay, "Night Coming Tenderly, Black," 2017, on exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago, January 11–April 14, [\[artic.edu/exhibitions/9038/dawoud-bey-night-coming-tenderly-black\]\(http://artic.edu/exhibitions/9038/dawoud-bey-night-coming-tenderly-black\).](https://www.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

10. Cleveland Historical team, "Hough," *Cleveland Historical*, 2019, <https://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/7>.

11. Kyla Murray, "Cleveland's Hough Riots of 1966," *Blackpast.org*, California, n.d. <https://blackpast.org/aah/cleveland-s-hough-riots-1966>.

12. Lorraine Boissoneault, "What happened when violence broke out on Cleveland's east side 50 years ago?" *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 24, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/complicated-history-1968-glenville-shootout-180969734/>.

13. Cleveland Historical team, "African Americans in Cleveland," 2019, *Cleveland Historical*, <https://clevelandhistorical.org/tours/show/43>.

14. James Robenault, "Ballots and Bullets: Cleveland's Role in the Civil Rights Movement," talk at the City Club of Cleveland, July 20, 2018, <https://www.cityclub.org/forums/2018/07/20/ballots-and-bullets-clevelands-role-in-the-civil-rights-movement>.

15. Cuyahoga County Planning Commission, 2016-2017 Cuyahoga County Community Food Assessment, prepared for Cuyahoga County Board of Health, January 31, 2017, www.ccbh.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2016-2017-Cuyahoga-County-Community-Food-Assessment-Report_Pt-1.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0L8n02BqSqQikOzWafwmrCj0p6pnXINPAAs29eA93RU7tDq0uPcl1eG3U.

16. Brad Masi, photos by Annette Bedway, "Cultivating the Land," *Edible Cleveland*, Spring, 2017, <http://ediblecleveland.com/stories/spring-2017/cultivation-stories#readmore>.

17. StoryLenz team, "Cleveland growing strong: an oral history," 2016, www.clevelandgrowingstrong.com.

18. EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute, <https://edwinsrestaurant.org/about-us/>.

19. David Sax, "How a winery is transforming Cleveland's most notorious neighborhood: The incredible story of Chateau Hough," *Good*, February 12, 2015, <https://www.good.is/features/chateau-hough-cleveland-winery>. Call (216) 469-0124 for appointments. 🐉