



MIAMI UNIVERSITY'S  
**CENTER FOR COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT**  
IN OVER-THE-RHINE

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## **STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN OVER-THE-RHINE**

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Fall 2006 was the inaugural semester for the **Miami University Over-the-Rhine Residency Program**. Twelve students chose to integrate academics with a full immersion experience to live and work together in inner-city Cincinnati. Six were architecture/interior design majors and the others came from psychology, philosophy, teacher education, family studies and social work, geography, and interdisciplinary studies. A core of three courses was offered at the Center for Community Engagement. Sister Alice Gerdeman taught the course in Service-Learning. Stephen Healy taught GEO 458: Cities of Difference. And I taught ARC 427: The American City Since 1940.

Beyond this core, the architecture majors (and the geography/urban planning major) spent most of their time designing and building an apartment unit for Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, an affordable housing development corporation with a long history in the neighborhood. John Blake taught this studio experience. The soon-to-be finished three-bedroom unit will house a family of modest means.

Other students engaged in service-learning in various neighborhood institutions that serve the under-served. The teacher education major worked full-time as a student teacher at Washington Park Elementary School.

All of the students attended meetings of various community groups, volunteered on Saturday mornings, and held weekly community dinners for themselves and invited guests from the community. Clare Etensohn, on-site resident coordinator, supervised these activities.

Bonnie Neumeier, a long-term resident and part of the administrative team of the whole program, held weekly sessions for journal writing, which proved invaluable for the students to unpack what they were experiencing within a critically reflective and nurturing environment. Bonnie was also indispensable in the students' learning when they became involved in significant community-based campaigns such as the

citywide, memorial tribute to community organizer buddy gray on the tenth anniversary of his death.

As much as I personally feel comfortable in Over-the-Rhine and have worked in that neighborhood since 1981, you never quite shake the media representations that shower over you every night and day on the nightly news or in the morning newspaper. “Another shooting on 14<sup>th</sup> Street” may be what greets your morning coffee. As the headline catches your eye, you know that the media get it mostly wrong, and you find yourself consciously calming yourself down. You know that for the fourth estate, “if it bleeds, it leads,” but it still takes a toll. So, I kept my cell phone on 24 hours per day. I did not turn it off even for the occasional movie or the Thanksgiving Break. And there were nights when I would awake abruptly at 4 am or so for no apparent reason.

Knowing that my students were impacted by these same media representations, I asked them to reflect upon their experiences in Over-the-Rhine in light of the course readings. I wanted to know how the reading material came to explain their experiences, if it did at all. What I got in response was a little overwhelming—powerful, personal testimonies about how they wrestled with their privilege, their fears, and their anger at the recognition that little is done by city officials, corporations, and state and federal governments to address the conditions produced in Over-the-Rhine. For many of them, they came to see life differently. Poverty became real. Voting became relevant. They became amazed as to how the daily lives of ordinary people affected them. They learned from the homeless and their neighbors. They saw community, and experienced its strong bonds and responsibilities. For many, the tables turned, and they now have some inkling of what life is like as a “minority.”

That the students were so affected speaks to how they were able to open their hearts and minds to be effected. They took a risk, they allowed themselves to be challenged, and they are hungry to make a difference.

What started out as culture shock grew into acceptance and even comfort. Around the mid-point of the semester many expressed feeling more at home in Over-the-Rhine than being on the campus. Many express culture shock again as they try now to re-acclimate back on the campus. This has not been a seamless process.

What follows are excerpts from those final papers.

### **Andrew Shreiner**

There is still a hesitation in my breath as I walk down the sidewalk in Over-the-Rhine. Should I fear congregated young black males listening to music sitting right outside my stoop? Or what about the men and women who just stumbled out of the alley and can barely open their eyes? Or the homeless man asking me for “ten cents?” Or my neighbors who sit on their

stoop drinking Steel Reserve wrapped in a brown paper bag all day? How about the white sedan with two white males staring me down like a wolf stalking its prey? Or the thirteen-year old kid who is sitting with some twenty-year olds smoking a Black and Mild? What about the group of teenagers passing around basketball and playing tag? Or the mother carrying her child to daycare? Or the hundreds of kids attending school across the street? Apparently, I should be scared of everything because America is a fear-induced society, and people living in poverty are criminalized in an effort to sustain a class, races, and gender bias system. Criminalizing the poor and the threat of it destroying America hands over the power to control and manipulate individuals. It's all a conspiracy that requires a revolution.

Before setting foot in Over-the-Rhine, poverty didn't exist. Secluded by the picket fences, cul-de-sacs, half-acre lawns, and strip malls my perception was that everyone had the resources and money necessary to live in America. I also believed in the idea of economic opportunity for everyone. However, Over-the-Rhine hit me like a bat hitting an apple. Everything that made sense crumbled. The experience has transitioned me from a passive, accepting, and narrow-minded idiot into a questioning, revolting, and active participant in this corrupt "land of the free." Suburbs are going to be the downfall of this country. In no way can they sustain themselves without the reliance of oil, environmental negligence, and a disregard of social awareness. I am outraged for the sequence of development after the Second World War. Suburban sprawl reinforced a racially segregated and class induced society, and to think of all the lives who sacrificed themselves for equality. Suburbanization sparked a passive subordination that is an evolved form of economic racism and classism. So, in going home soon, I might freak out!

### **Brittany Drapac**

When my professor Tom Dutton asked me to reflect on shifts in my thinking, I thought he had said *ships*. Instead of considering my experience as a series of shifts, I'll think of it as ships in my mind. I stood by myself across the Ohio River one night, looking at the multi-layered relief that is the Cincinnati sky. City lights, these infinite reflections in the water—I had to stand still because they could not. Steam liners, barges sauntering by, confident river strides, some faster than others. Sometimes I glance away, and when I look back I can't find them, masked ghosts—your eyes unable to tell what's moving and what's not. The ships in my mind move me, and when I'm not watching, they change routes, and I have to listen to their whispers to find out where I'm going. Over-the-Rhine has not changed me. It is constantly changing me. It's not just one shift, a move in a certain direction. Rather, it's these fluid ships of thought—unbounded, the water moves them.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the Over-the-Rhine Residency Program was the integration of reality, academia, and social engagement. It has made me realize both the limitations and advantages of higher education and the need for collaboration with the truths of everyday life—the ways in which knowledge can advance a greater cause. A man told me the other day that I shouldn't be there. Because I didn't have to be. I had the heart to understand the struggles of poverty and now I needed to get out fast. Because I had the resources, the ambition, the social and economic potential to make change. This experience will continuously change the way I think and the way in which I design. On more than one occasion, I have felt disillusioned, incapable—too many problems, not enough working solutions, one person among many. But the people who live here; the people who live nowhere; the people who live—as they have the hope to survive one more day, so I must have the hope to make their lives better. I have never talked so much about revolution. I have never asked so many questions. I have never had so many conversations about societal change and existentialism and ignorance and longing and frustration. I have never been unable to keep up with my own thoughts as I do now, and I have never felt so completely alive and ready. What gets me going? Everything. I can make a thousand more connections of architecture to the world and the world to architecture and I can question ever one of them. I have found myself three times over and am waiting for more.

### **Ericka Coulter**

I am overwhelmed with emotion and plans for my future and dreams of what I want to stand for and accomplish in my life. I feel this overwhelming need and task to change the world. I have become angry, unable to rest or to accept what is and has been. I do not want to settle for the current reality. I know we need change and I believe in the power to create it even more after learning and experiencing the injustices of our system.

I have learned from the people I work with. I have learned that if you care about a woman who isn't feeling well, after that every time she sees you she will be glad to see you; a creation of human connection that says "I care about you." Women are strong; we know our weaknesses, our struggles and our talents. We are tired, we are pissed off, we are starving and we will still dance with our sisters. We will rejoice in the day that is upon us. People have problems, people are born into not the best of situations but still succeed in life, perhaps reach a success that I will never know. I met a woman at the Sarah Center who has been sober for 10 years. She rejoices in her triumph over her addiction and the new life she has created. These women live with struggles, demanding children, husbands and boyfriends and their own health, which in itself is quite complicated in a poor neighborhood. These women make

huge quantities of jewelry during their manic episodes and then it lulls away with depression. Women rule the homes and the organizations and still have to work to make their voices heard. We are the caregivers and the nurturers. These women are the backbone of the community. At the Sarah Center I have met some very strong, beautiful women; women who have gifts that I will never have, an artistic vision and a strengthened spirit because of what this life has been for them.

The readings for this course were unlike anything I have read for a class before... This class forced me to think of the forgotten people, about white privilege, about race and racism. I often read for this class or others during naptime at the daycare. It was a strange feeling of reading about what these peoples' lives are—as if I would read a passage or statistic and then look at the children and see how it played out. Everyone has their own ideas about what the problems are and what is going on that's right. One woman said that you cannot raise your children to fit into the stereotype that society has created; you must instead rise above it. She understands how society views the black race. She purposely named her children Molly and Michelle so that they could at least not be judged as soon as someone heard their names. This is unjust that a woman must consider what she names her children in order to avoid stereotypes and racism. I question what is wrong with this black urban way of life. There are outcries about single mothers and rap music and unreliable fathers. I ask what if we accepted this way of life as not wrong but just different. There is a larger population of single mothers, but why is that seen as a negative when there is usually a large family network there to offer support? We should focus on the strengths and the strength in differences instead of prescribing only one norm that will work for people. Over-the-Rhine is not West Chester, so why should we try to change into that or make the people like the zombies in suburbia? These people look in your eyes when you pass on the sidewalk! We should rejoice in that humane and human connection. Why is it that the United States of America tries to make everyone into the same person? In my naiveté I always thought this country was founded on freedom, but I guess it depends on whose definition of freedom and who gets the right to freedom.

### **Shawn Thomas**

I've had to tell so many people that I'm still a Miami student although they haven't seen my face in a while when I talk to them, whether it's in Oxford when I'm visiting or via internet messaging. Then I explain to them that I'm doing a service-learning program in Cincinnati. Then the questions start pouring in: How long are you doing it? Are you coming back? Do you still go to Miami? Where in Cincinnati? Is it just for Architecture? What's it like? What do you do? Are you ready to come back to Oxford? As I'm answering people, I realize

more and more why programs such as this are so valuable to a college education.

I'm happier now more than ever that I participated in the residency program. I did enjoy the change of scenery, however, my experience was not that of a vacation away from school. It was one of meaningful learning. I had plenty of knowledge as to the environment of inner city, predominantly Black neighborhoods like Over-the-Rhine, but I quickly recognized that everything I heard about Over-the-Rhine wasn't entirely true, realizing my own susceptibility to unverified information presented through the media. I myself came into this program having accepted portrayals of the neighborhood as ultimate fact along with everyone else. We were all immediately proven wrong.

As far as my perception of Over-the-Rhine, I gained a better understanding. From the readings to living down there, I realized that news reports and other information about the neighborhood were either inaccurate altogether or exaggerated. I expected to hear gunshots throughout the day (something common in Dayton) and to see fights on every other corner, among other things. I only heard a few gunshots the entire time I was down there and only saw a few fights. Some of the readings explained how the media gives false impressions of place to inculcate negative notions into the minds of those with the power and resources to bring about change. This prevents change from coming about, maintaining oppression's grip on the less fortunate.

So when someone asks me about the program, I have plenty of beneficial information to tell them. It's a program of enlightenment. You learn in the classroom and more importantly outside of the classroom. You get the experience to back up what you read about, or to refute what you read about, or to gain knowledge that has never been covered in any book. You build meaningful relationships with people of the community. You have more respect for those living in such conditions—possibly even admiration. Some participants at first couldn't even fathom how single parent mothers balanced school, work, and children, maintained a household, and then developed unprecedented respect for them. You see injustices and prejudices first hand, which makes a permanent impression on you, moving you to want to do more to bring about positive change.

The environment is lively, very different from Oxford, or other small, suburban towns most Miami students come from. Even ordinary things are amazing: ice cream trucks, people saying hello to strangers, neighbors watching out for each other. A community exists in Over-the-Rhine. People aren't put on social pedestals; when you're all struggling you look out for each other and that's what's important. People make you feel like you're a part of the community without even knowing you.

My own personal development has been great indeed, and I've come from a place like Over-the-Rhine. My participation had a different twist on it than what would be conventional for this program. So for those whom such living conditions are entirely new, the experience is so amazing that it should basically be a requirement for all colleges across all majors.

**Annaliese Newmeyer**

“The subtlety of this modern empire building puts the Roman centurions, the Spanish conquistadors, and the eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century European colonial powers to shame... We are on the record, in the open. Or so we portray ourselves and so are we accepted. It is how the system works. We seldom resort to anything illegal because the system itself is built on subterfuge, and the system is by definition legitimate.”

John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*

I chose this quote because I believe that it best articulates what I have learned this semester through my classes and experiences in Over-the-Rhine. Our government, or the system, relies on the oppression of the lower class and the middle class' alliance with the rich in order to work in the interests of corporations. Their discrimination is more subtle than ever before, taking form in structured racism and gentrification. Learning about racism has in turn helped me understand Over-the-Rhine and other urban areas in America. It has given me a voice to fight with.

This semester has angered me and made me understand the culture of Over the Rhine better. The Black Power article articulates my sentiments beautifully, “Black people are not in a depressed condition because of some defect in their character. The colonial power structure clamped a boot of oppression on the neck of the black people and then, ironically, said, “They are not ready for freedom.”” African-Americans have suffered through slavery, through the policies and laws of our government that have kept them in an inhumane condition, through welfare reform, through structured racism, through racist prison systems, through gentrification.....the list goes on and on. So, when does it end? When do Americans defend their country by providing basic rights and resources for all? When do we take the blame?

This semester has taught me to critically analyze all the information I receive, whether it is from the media or from a teacher. It has taught me to look deeper into explanations given by so-called authority. It has taught me to recognize the problems in our society and forced me to not look away or hide from them. It has taught me to confront myself, my opinions, my judgments, and my own accountability. It has given me the words to change the lives of all that I encounter.

### **Chris DeLuca**

No person can deny that the current conditions of our urban centers have diminished in the wake of globalization and the rise of the post-industrial society. We need only to look at the six o'clock news to see reports of crime soaking our downtrodden urban areas.

The Mayor stated forthrightly that his plan had nothing to do with the gentrification of Over-the-Rhine, but was based on the concept of "Urban Regeneration—without the displacement of the lower class." One would think that to improve the lives ghetto dwellers we would need to improve the array of social and economic services benefiting these people and to increase the amount of social welfare to lift them up and improve the quality of their lives. But urban regeneration has little to do with such concerns. It is distinctly an economic practice to raise the property values of the urban centers.

Urban regeneration calls solely for an economic facelift. It strives to disseminate market values to all institutions and social action. In order to see urban regeneration more clearly as a detriment to diversity and a heterogeneous culture, we must realize that we cannot measure people with market values. Measuring the worth of a person by interpreting his/her economic value is a flawed concept. Seeing a person solely as an economic factor doesn't allow for any sort of compassion or empathy.

My semester in Over-the-Rhine has had a profound impact on me. It has altered the direction of my future and most potently, on the way that I think. I plan to live and work in Over-the-Rhine after I graduate. My thematic sequence was instrumental in this: it gave me the knowledge I needed to understand not only what is happening in Over-the-Rhine, but also the current state of affairs of our country and, by extension, the entire world. Our classroom knowledge supplemented our real-world learning, which for me took the form of community service with Over-the-Rhine Community Housing. I am a better person because of all of this. I am more compassionate and more understanding in regard to other people. I know what needs to be done, and now I have no problem doing it.

### **William Lohr**

Another meaningful point of growth was in reading Andrew Barlow's *Between Fear and Hope*. Barlow discusses how globalization increases inequality, yet works in a 'color-blind' framework and propagates structured racism. "The main proposition setting the terms of the American debate about race today is the claim that societal racism is dead" (p. 9). "'Race' is depicted as a way to group 'antimodern' people. Those who insist on acknowledging race as essential to combat racism are depicted as clinging to backward, and racist, ideas" (p.11). However, as Barlow, in the tradition of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, points out is that such race-neutral projects often have very real

racialized outcomes. As we read in Stephen Healy's class, Eric Mann's *Combating Transit Racism in Los Angeles* empirically demonstrates such racialized outcomes of 'color-blind' development so much so that a lawsuit against the Metropolitan Transit Authority was successful in invoking civil rights legislation.

Another tangible byproduct from these processes is the creation of the white habitus. The white habitus "refers to social arrangements that make it possible for a white person to live his or her life in a virtually all-white environment, moving seamlessly from a highly racialized suburban community to a racialized school or workplace to racialized friendships and family networks" (p. 16). I was taken back by the reality of such a notion. Although reluctant at first to admit it, I began to understand my own racial isolation. Living in Over-the-Rhine definitely helped this process. Being the minority in OTR contrasted so drastically life in Oxford that it was easier for me to see how white my life in Oxford really is. One day my boyfriend, Justin, and I were going to the Kroger's in Oxford. The grocery store was neither overcrowded nor deserted, but there were no black people! Aisle after aisle I purposefully searched for one, just one, black shopper—or employee for that matter. None. I was outraged at Oxford, at the nation, and at myself for buying into it all. I tried raising the subject with Justin and he shrugged it off matter-of-factly. Something like, "Well, that's Oxford for you."

### **Justin Losego**

Living in Over-the-Rhine has produced many shifts in my suburban-molded morals. These once familiar and concrete ideas of society and the government have been challenged and pushed through debates and first-hand experiences from living in OTR. Once the uncomfortable feeling of living here subsided, I was able to take in my surroundings and actually relate them to course readings and delve into a world of politics I had never given any interest or questioned much in the past.

Coming from a middle class suburban household, I didn't have much to question in relation to ghettos and poor people, because I was barely ever in contact with these alternative conditions. Before this experience, voting wasn't that important to me. I always felt that the stereotypical phrase, "how can one vote make a difference," was true. Now, I can't help but recognize the ignorance of my thoughts before this program and how important it truly is to take part in politics and voting.

I must say I have been most influenced by Bonnie and buddy gray's actions, which showed me that one person can make a difference and that without these people nothing would ever change and no one would be inspired. I have become inspired and motivated to do all I can in my future endeavors,

not just by them but from all I have experienced living and learning in Over-the-Rhine.

**Katrina Mosher**

The struggles of the poor and homeless and their daily lives really touched me this semester. I've become aware of the prevalence of drugs and why children can very easily fall into that lifestyle. Kids often get hired by dealers to run errands and they see how the dealers make fast cash while others are struggling to keep a job and are not making near as much money. With drugs come problems with addiction, the police, and imprisonment. In the past few months I've heard multiple stories of addiction, been offered drugs, and witnessed many arrests. I was present during election time and learned about the effort to raise the minimum wage and the proposed tax to build a new jail. I've learned more about the April 2001 uprisings and Operation Vortex.

Overall, this semester has shifted my thinking on various topics and changed me in ways I have yet to discover. It's hard to summarize what has happened this fall but it has been an interesting and life-changing journey. The articles read, people we've met, encounters we've had are a part of us now and will continue to influence and affect the way we think, work, and interact as citizens of the world. I have become a socially aware, peace and justice-focused woman working to improve the world in which we live as brothers and sisters.

**Rachel Rhodebeck**

Joining the Over-the-Rhine community for the fall semester of my senior year did not come without risk. I left my clubs, professors, and friends I have lived and grown with for three years within the city of Oxford, and I joined a community of residents in a city I did not know, with twelve Miami students that I had never met. Regardless of adversity coming from family and friends, this urban immersion program is one of the most life-changing experiences I have ever encountered.

A passion for urban education brought me to Over-the-Rhine to teach at Washington Park Elementary, a place that I felt I would be able to teach at my fullest potential and gain the experience necessary for teaching in an urban setting. I was welcomed into the school by the students and staff faster than I anticipated and found myself sharing personal and professional conversation with a staff that respected me as a colleague. I quickly got to know the students in my first and second grade multi-age class, as well as the other classes in the school. I was able to build a rapport with them that allowed me to plan activities for the neighborhood children on the weekends, which included a Halloween party, winter crafts and games, Trick-or-Treating, and a visit to Santa Claus. Parents and students would see me walking around Over-the-Rhine, the same streets they walk, and call out to me, hug me, and talk to me about their

child's education and home life. This experience allowed me to connect to students and families in a way that many teachers never have the opportunity to do. Not only did this build relationships with my students and their parents, but it also helped me to improve my instruction in the classroom because I was more aware of students' needs and they were more open to sharing and working with me.

Living, studying, and working in Over-the-Rhine for a semester also allowed me to develop a political understanding and passion for equality. I studied and became involved in the trials of the homeless and their fight for affordable housing and an adequate minimum wage. I re-evaluated my priorities, not always consciously. I learned not to "sweat the small stuff" and now value relationships, self-reflection, activism—fighting to make a change and supporting my community over many of my past, often insignificant priorities. I discovered my true personality and values. I evaluated my past and re-evaluated my plans for the future. I found myself in Over-the-Rhine.

This would not have been possible without the real-life experiences gained each day living in this urban environment. I was given the opportunity to learn, not only from the literature required in our courses, but from the people who are actually living the life and struggles that we were studying. I left Over-the-Rhine, not remembering a time that I did not know this place and these people, to go back to a place I once knew so well—and now see completely differently. I am dedicated to remain connected to the issues, community, and people in Over-the-Rhine and have found a spark in myself to activate change. With the support of my service-learning class, I also feel supported and prepared to organize students and residents in Over-the-Rhine and places like it to make a difference. My passion for urban education has only become stronger, and with the knowledge and experience gained in Over-the-Rhine, I am confident and prepared to continue living and teaching in an urban environment.

### **Jeffrey Kruth**

Probably one of the biggest shifts in thinking for me living down here is that there is a sense of community. As I stated on the first page, my initial reaction to being down here was to try and blend in, out of fear for being different. Yet through the weeks, I've found the community that exists here, and from my perspective it is a heck of a lot more viable than Oxford. People talk to each other, go through the same hardships together, and are listened to with the same degree or earnest (which is often not at all) by government. And while none of us were "truly" accepted into the community, we were respected for who we are and what we were doing. And while the Over-the-Rhine People's Movement is somewhat more institutionalized than it once was, it fosters to the community that already exists, not one that is being created out of motive of profit.

The other large shift that occurred for me this semester was actual involvement in the community. Not only is the classroom setting essential for a college experience, but also to practice what you preach is an essential element to development. Community council meetings, buddy gray memorial meetings, the design/build studio, 3CDC meetings, and meeting people from Peaslee Neighborhood Center, the Contact Center, the Drop Inn, as well as residents engaged in an everyday setting—it actually feels like I was a part of something. And while I don't think I will ever be able to completely comprehend everything that goes on down here, it's nice to know that I was part of something that was larger than myself, and something that I actually believe in.

The other thing that I think I was not accustomed to is standing up for my belief systems. My sister, the successful accountant and self-proclaimed conservative because she "doesn't like taxes," has been one of my largest feuds this semester. And while I don't think I have convinced her that self-determination isn't the only school of thought out here, I have at least gotten her to think about it, which is a start. And having to put up with drunk fraternity brothers calling you a "n\*\*\*er lover" because I stand up for the residents in Over-the-Rhine is certainly a shift. I realize that people may not take this issue as seriously as I, and that being down here is much different than being in Oxford as well as other places around the nation. So, I will have to come to terms with that.

### **Britni Rex**

This is a great program to really get young people to think about real issues, real problems with this world we live in. And I will be forever grateful for this opportunity. It has really given me the chance to get involved, and that has seemed to fill an empty space in my heart.

I have experienced the sweet nuns around the community, the kids from Washington Park Elementary, the old men out on the street, the residents of the Drop Inn Center, the pimped out cars with their loud music, the kids on the corner with no supervision, the out of town cars passing through where they don't belong, the cops with their sirens, flashing lights, and loud speakers outside my window, one lonely gun shot late one night, the smell of pot around a corner, the cussing woman walking down the alley, the look in the eyes of the really skinny woman looking for a fix, the smell of piss under the deck as you pass Bang's on the way home, the love of the residents for this community, the strength to carry on buddy's vision and the accomplishments of his life, and the passion of Bonnie. I cherish every moment I've had in OTR.

I will miss the hello's, the walks to the site, the buddy gray planning meetings, working with Barbara Wolf on the DVDs, journal writings with Bonnie, community dinners, using

a drill, hammer, tape measure, saw, nails, screws, tile, and drywall everyday, and the teamwork!

I wish I could have done so much more while I was here. I wish I could have started a fundraising committee at OTRCH, and started bringing in donations, done more with informing people of buddy gray before and after the march, done more community service at different organizations, gotten to know more people in the community and what they have to offer to help with the OTR People's Movement, and I wish we could have finished the project at 530 E 13<sup>th</sup>. I will miss the readings, which were full of information and so much inspiration. The number of deep concerns and issues that we mentioned in class could have taken up an entire semester by itself.

I have been talking to everyone I see at Miami, raving that I wish everyone could experience the OTR Residency Program because it will benefit their lives more than anyone could ever predict.

### *Writings from my journal*

I have found a new passion, well not really found a new one just deepened the feelings. I have found a task I wish to complete, one I can't turn away from.

I have found people, true people. People with lives harder than mine.

I have found friends, ones I hope will be around for years to come.

I have found myself, the person I was born to be.

I have found one of the main purposes in my life. To change something. To make a difference in people's lives and the way systems are running in this day and age.

I have found a home. Where I want to stay for a while to learn and grow.

Could I have found all of these things somewhere else?

Why was I brought here, to this one place?

Why have I found life in an area many say is dying?

Can I help save this place? The values, traditions, love, hope, cheer, people, lives, community, and natural feelings of those who have lived here through the hard times.

I feel everyone can find things they never knew existed if they just open the gates of their heart, open their eyes and look forward.

I looked past my nose and into the eyes of the residents and found something. I don't know if I can explain it, but whatever it is has changed my path, the path I had planned out before I experienced OTR.

I'm sad about one thing.

I wish I could have experienced its past, met buddy gray and the law enforcement in that time of struggle, experienced the good and the bad.

I wish I could experience the future, and make sure things turn out all right.

I do not know where I will go from here.

I don't know if I'll even be able to really leave at all.

What will I find somewhere else?

In Over-The-Rhine, I am a woman! A white woman! Here because it feels right! Here to rebuild and beautify a small space. I am in OTR as a new face. What kind of face, I do not know. I hope a friendly face, one of caring and happiness. I have not figured out my place. I wonder if I will ever fit in, because I feel like I already do. I feel part of this great community. One in which I hope does not fade. Yes I see the drugs on the street, but it does not run this place, the beautiful faces and hearts that I see everyday on the stoops are the foundation of my happiness here. So I guess I'm here because of the people, to meet the ones who care about and live their lives in this community. I wish everyone could experience what I have in my short time here, I know it has been short, but I truly believe it is one of the best times of my life. One I will tell to all my friends and family, and then to my children in the future. I know they will probably never understand, but I'll know the truth in my heart and I'll always be able to return to this place within my heart and memories. So my plan is to be involved. **TO BE A WOMAN IN THE COMMUNITY!** To go to the M mayor next time with more knowledge and make sure he knows more than 1500 people live in OTR! To show I am involved and truly care, AND I'm NOT here as a spectator, here to collect information to compose a research paper! I am here because I want to be...