

The Scoop From The Stoop



Academic service learning integrates service with academics through immersion that nurtures understanding while addressing the diverse needs and issues within an area.

Political activity shows itself rampant in Over-the-Rhine

by **Emily TeKolste**

In this election year, we have the privilege of witnessing the political activity in Over-the-Rhine. As we moved in, we were told that we were entering into a politically active neighborhood. However, we've also been informed that, while the area has one of the highest voter registration rates, it has one of the lowest voter turnout rates in the city.

During one walk around the neighborhood, three of us

stopped in the office of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) for Obama. While talking to one of the men in the office, he said, "We aren't voting for him because he's black. A lot of people are voting for him because he's black; but we're voting for him because he's brilliant."

I also found a flyer promoting Barack Obama on the sidewalk. The flyer stated that it was paid for solely by SEIU Center on Political Education (COPE) and

not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee. On another day, I saw a different flyer sitting on the couch in the apartment outlining the health care plans of both major party candidates, also distributed by SEIU. SEIU is working for the candidate it supports as the best future president for the country.

Also, at OTR's Findlay Market, there is a stand containing political merchandise for one of the presidential

candidates. Everything is sold for a "donation." The vendor has yard signs, t-shirts, buttons, and stickers. He also has voter registration forms to encourage voting. From the merchandise to encouraging political activity, this vendor wants to make an impact on the election.

As Election Day has drawn nearer, we've continued to see more political activity. Members of our group sitting out on our stoop have even had someone *(continued on page 2)*

Residential indicators of structural racism

by **Tara Immele**

A necessary part of living in Over-the-Rhine, and living in general, is buying food. This need invariably leads to grocery shopping. So off we go at least once a week, and often several times, to the local grocery store located only a short walk away. In many ways, the store is accessible. Yet that is where the convenience oftentimes stops. The building is small, crowded, and under-stocked, and boasts a minimal parking lot, holding 16 customer vehicles at a time. While being new to the neighborhood, countless people warned us to watch the labels of food at this location. They are locally famous for selling food near or past the "sell by" date. I personally have purchased a half gallon of milk, one day expired, reduced to \$.30. There are many scenarios where the food is regular

price, but only a day or two away from its expiration date.

Such actions would not be tolerated at many other grocery stores in other neighborhoods. There are many other grocery stores and supermarkets throughout Cincinnati that offer better services. Near campus, Norwood has such a resource, and so does Hyde Park. Our OTR grocery store keeps its doors open 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day, minus Saturday, which is 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. This is adequate, but not an amenity that goes above and beyond. Many grocery stores offer services other than just the basic food selection, such as a bakery, deli, or pharmacy. In the services it claims, our store only carries one service: liquor. This may reflect stereotypes of the demographics in the area. In comparison to what

other neighborhoods have available, Over-the-Rhine's grocery store limits selection, space, and general services.

This store is, of course, a business. Yet it should not be disregarded as just a coincidence that what one Over-the-Rhine residents claimed is the smallest and slowest grocery store "in all of Ohio" is placed in Over-the-Rhine. Many people who shop at this location have very little choice in where to get their groceries. They often do not have the means to go elsewhere, or it would be unwise, at least, to pay the additional bus fare and endure the inconvenience to travel outside the neighborhood to a separate grocery store. Residents have limited selection, earlier expiration dates, fewer services (note the lack of a pharmacy), sometimes *(continued on page 2)*

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov. 7-9: *Chicago service learning trip*
Dec. 12, 4 p.m.: *Community Presentation*

For more information on the Xavier Academic Service Learning Semesters, contact Dr. Irene Hodgson at hodgson@xavier.edu or 513-745-3541.

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CeaseFire and class offer reflections on community

by **Graham Wesley**

One Friday afternoon a few weeks ago, we joined CeaseFire Cincinnati in a march through Over-the-Rhine. The event was organized by CeaseFire to encourage members of the community to voice their feelings and act against the violence in the neighborhood. The seven of us and Sr. Alice Gerdeman, who teaches our Contemporary Ethics class, joined CeaseFire at the beginning of the march with about ten people. As we walked through the neighborhood, residents and other students

joined the chants of “Cease fire!” and “Stop the shooting!” bringing our numbers to almost 40. Signs and chants of “They want to grow up!” focused on the safety of the neighborhood’s young people. At an intersection in the heart of the neighborhood, the marchers formed a circle, joined hands, and bowed our heads to pray.

Grassroots movements like those encouraged by CeaseFire encourage the kind of community organization we have been discussing in our Contemporary Ethics and Community Building and Urban

Change classes. Community Building and Urban Change guest lecturer John McKnight, a community organizer from Northwestern University in Chicago, encouraged asset-based community development. This method of community organization focuses on the abilities and talents within the community as a contrast to the method of community organizing that seeks to obtain help from outsiders to better a community. The difference lies in the focus—the positive rather than the negative and the assets rather than the deficiencies.

McKnight suggests that

communities hold the resources necessary to bring about change in their own hands. This change can come directly from the community members’ own inspiration and activity, but communities can also be motivated by outsiders who spark ideas or ignite movement, thus motivating community members to organize themselves. We are learning that change in communities is most successful for the people of the community if they actively participate in that change, and this is why community organization has become a focus of learning for us this semester.

Grocery (continued from page 1)

higher prices, and overall customer dissatisfaction. This would not be tolerated in other neighborhoods. But is it because this is a lower socioeconomic area? Or is it because it - to mention the taboo of race - is a predominantly *black* neighborhood, to mention the taboo of race? Why is this grocery store, with its status, located within this neighborhood? The condition of this store may be either a cause or an effect of Over-the-Rhine and its dynamics and demographics. Whether cause, effect, or both, there is definitely a correlation. It is

the continuing oppression of a people that are sick of being oppressed in other forms. It is good that this store is here. OTR residents *need* a place to purchase their groceries. Yet it should be so much better. The status of the store where people buy their groceries is a two-way indicator: a mirror of outsiders’ attitudes and a further demonstration of the systematic and institutional racism that plagues this historic neighborhood and its people. Yes, it may be as minor as a grocery store. However, it is clearly unjust to Over-the-Rhine citizens.



My'eka and Austin pry a counter top loose from a home in the town of Jean Lafitte, which is south of New Orleans. The group gutted a total of five houses in four days of work; all the houses had been flooded by Hurricane Ike this year.

Presidential campaigning activity (continued from page 1)

bike by and stop to talk about politics. A young man came to our door with information about voter registration, early voting, and absentee voting. A young woman on the sidewalk outside the grocery store stopped me to make sure I was registered to vote and knew about alternative voting options.

I find it interesting to note the way campaigns go about getting support. Obviously

campaigns want to make sure voters are registered, and they focus their efforts on neighborhoods in which they’re most likely to get support. Yet I was still first asked if I supported a particular candidate, before I was asked if I was registered to vote. My first thought was that it annoyed me that they bothered to ask. In general, I believe people should be trying to register all potential and

eligible voters. Furthermore, in this neighborhood, it’s very likely that most people in the area are voting for one particular candidate. So even if the woman did register someone who will vote for her campaign’s opponent, this vote will be far outweighed by the number of people whom she registers who will vote for her candidate. Yet someone pointed out to me, as a point of interest, that I am a

white woman walking around Over-the-Rhine. I don’t know if she was asking everyone that question of whether they supported her candidate, but if not, it could have been a racial prejudice.

Still, in this election, the campaigns are making sure they support every person who can vote, especially in the battleground state of Ohio.

A Tuesday in the life of Christopher Place . . .

by Christopher Place

On Tuesdays I wake up around 6:15 a.m. to perform my morning routine. Afterwards, I go downstairs to eat breakfast and pack a lunch (which ends up as a morning snack) for our day on campus. With a few extra minutes, I may look over some last minute school work, but then I head out the door to the bus stop, our source of transit to and from campus.

Almost as soon I leave the apartment, I am not surprised to hear “What’s up, Horshack?” Someone calls to me using my street nickname based on my curly hair being similar to the character, Horshack, on the TV show “Welcome Back Kotter.” Unfamiliar with the reference, I have still accepted the nickname for the sense of community I find with my neighbors. After briefly checking in with the crowd around the stoop, I head to the bus stop while continuing to greet familiar faces and

strangers along the way.

Riding the bus is an experience in itself. Depending on the time and how the schedule has been running, the morning commute can range from crowded to packed. Common boundaries of physical and privacy are often bent. Conversations, music, and arm/leg space are... how to put it, shared, regardless of most wishes. However, I find this situation relatively tolerable and see it as an opportunity to experience another aspect of my neighbors’ daily experience. Some of the most revealing moments that I have experienced were through listening and observing people on the bus until we get off at our stop.

The time that I spend on campus presents an interesting dynamic because I am internally conflicted about how I should spend it. I know I wish to be social, to maintain

relationships, and to make new friendships. I also know that I wish to fully participate in, to fully focus on, and fully grow from this Urban semester. As an extravert, I know I receive energy from interactions with many people; however, I also know that I can often become distracted and caught up with people, losing my focus on responsibilities and time. It is additionally challenging because I feel my semester’s schedule is very exhausting and possibly overwhelming. Hence, I have very little energy and focus to spare. Therefore, how I choose to manage this situation is crucial: receive energy and lose focus, or remain focused and continue to drain myself. I am far from mastering my time, and it seems that regardless of how I spend my time on campus, I am consistently disgruntled about something as I reflect about the day on the commute home. But I guess that just

leaves room for improvement.

The afternoon bus trip is less crowded. However, as a result of close proximity and curiosity, I still get a chance to glimpse a piece of my neighbors’ lives. After arriving back at the apartment, the rest of the afternoon is filled with visits from neighborhood kids, possibly a trip to the grocery store in preparation for dinner, which leads to more visiting with the neighbors and homework during all the moments in between. Occasionally, I will run into men from the Drop-Inn Center’s Addiction Recovery Program, where I volunteer at on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. It is rewarding to be able to catch them on the street and hear how their days are going. After dinner and dishes are completed, homework continues to reign until exhaustion invades, followed by sleep, and then a whole new day of exciting events.

A Wednesday in the life of Erin Capitena . . .

by Erin Capitena

“Hello Moto...” my alarm sings to me, waking me from my sleep. I quietly get ready and make my way to the kitchen where I pack a lunch. Just before 8 a.m., Chris, Graham, and I walk to St. Francis Seraph, the Franciscan church in Over-the-Rhine, for daily mass. We see Dr. Rahner, the medical director at Crossroad Health Center, my service site, and Sr. Alice, our Theology teacher at mass.

After mass, I walk across the street for my volunteer hours beginning at 9 a.m. On a good day, I get to interact with the patients and do the work of the medical assistants. The M.A.s are already starting to huddle, to prepare, the charts for the

practitioners. When pediatric patients arrive, I bring them from the lobby to their rooms, pausing at the scale to weigh them and measure their heights. For well-child checks, I also test the patients’ vision and hearing. Between patients, I enter shot records into the online all-Ohio shot database and huddle the afternoon charts. On days when the medical assistants or the nurses are not as willing to share their work load with me, I work in a separate room or behind a computer all day with no patient contact. After a lively lunch, I work with Brook, the volunteer coordinator who is also the grant-writer and a certified nurse practitioner. I (continued on page 5)



Erin checks in patients at Crossroad Health Center, her service site. Crossroad is a primary care health care provider in Over-the-Rhine.

Don't look; don't stare

by Austin Muller

This article has no thesis, no agenda, and no real structure. It's a raw reflection of my thoughts, questions, and feelings in regards to New Orleans and the Urban Semester. My only wish is to give you insight to my experience. I challenge anyone remotely interested in any of my words to respond to me in writing or email at mullera@xavier.edu.

New Orleans surprised me to say the least. However, it was not Bourbon Street, nor the hollow residential neighborhoods left unmowed in New Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes, or even the sight of an entire family's life heaped together on the front lawn of a bare house stripped down to the studs; what surprised me most about New Orleans had to do with two different experiences on two different buses.

Our travel arrangements consisted of a 20-hour Greyhound trek that left most of us sleep-deprived and frustrated. My experience on the trip was brightened by a friendly stranger named Tommy. We met when I plopped down next to him on a transfer bus in Montgomery, AL. We started with small talk about KFC chicken. With the prospect of a good five hours ahead of us, we just kept talking. Our topics ranged from what motivates people to relationships to fantasizing about our heroism in the odd chance that the bus rolls over. Our common ground was our passion. I could feel and see an untamed excitement for life in his eyes, which kept our minds thinking and hearts pumping all the way down to New Orleans. I could go on about our time together and the many ways Tommy was the single best part

of my New Orleans experience. This bus was more than a vehicle for us to get from one place to another; it provided the means for Tommy and me to come together as strangers and to leave as friends, regardless of the fact that he was homeless and an ex-con and that I was a Xavier student on a service trip.

The second bus trip was in a tour bus. I couldn't escape a series of letters dancing around in my head that screamed: POVERTY TOURISTS. Just like when I was ten years old and took a class tour of Colonial Williamsburg, I was now taking a tour of a disaster, and more frightening, a tour of poor people. In visiting museums and historic sites we are preserving history. It certainly can't be true that in touring the poor we are preserving poverty. This concept of poverty tourism should be regarded as a double edged sword. The tour was a necessity for me to familiarize myself with New Orleans as well as an opportunity to better understand my experiences in OTR. However, in magnifying the conditions of the poor from afar, we are unintentionally reinforcing the separation between ourselves and those who find themselves in the conditions of poverty. It's funny—the concept of a magnifying glass. It is a resourceful tool in understanding the environment and patterns of ants. If we aren't mindful of the way we hold it in the sun, it has the potential to be much more destructive than helpful.

No matter how hard I attempted to escape that middle bus seat, I couldn't. I felt like I was the stifled conscience (continued on page 5)



Megan Shapiro, assistant to Dr. Irene Hodgson and fellow New Orleans traveler, measures the wall as Tara stands by ready to mark it for the chalk line used to cut out the bottom half of the sheet rock so the house can dry out and be redone.

I'm talking to you!

by My'eka Harkness

Have you ever said something that you meant in one way and someone totally misunderstood what you said? Were you more surprised by their reaction or the way they interpreted your statement? This is exact thing happened to me, but it was not my statement that had been misunderstood. While our group was in New Orleans, we saw a movie called "Talkin' Waters." The film was about four girls who were making a documentary about Hurricane Katrina. These young girls were making deep connections within their own lives in the film. Two of the girls had experienced Katrina

and two of them hadn't. One of the girls who had experienced the hurricane first-hand had a major breakthrough during the film. She said something that created a wave of mixed emotions across the crowd. Silly me, here I am thinking "That was deep. She has said something that really hit home". At the same time, one of the other members of the crowd completely disliked her comments. How do I know? Because he told me. We had a short conversation about people's likes and dislikes of the movie. This audience member said that this was the only part he didn't like. "Blacks (continued on page 5)

(continued from pg. 4) were not the only one's affected by Hurricane Katrina. Why can't people just say that people were left behind, not just Black people? Katrina was not white people's fault." He exclaimed. I tried to explain to him that this was not what she was saying and that he had totally misunderstood. I also explained that at one point in the film she did talk about "people" being affected by Katrina, not just blacks. I couldn't understand why he let the entire experience of this film go to waste over a few lines at the end of the feature.

Over the course of the next

couple weeks we spread the news of about what we had learned while in New Orleans. I kept hearing certain people say they thought it was about socioeconomic conditions and not race. I just didn't know how to say to people what I want them to know. So now I'm going to write it in this newsletter the best way I can:

There are many times when we want things to disappear or we cover them up. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, many people covered up race with socioeconomic language. Our history as a country has shown through law, policy, and humiliation which race was

the lowest on the food chain. Blacks were the herbivores below the Venus flytrap. There were times when they didn't even have a pot to prey on, but they have always had a struggle to pray on. I can't stand when I hear people say it's the "impoverished" population when minorities make up the most of that population. I don't want this to turn into a battle of the races because in that case someone has to be the better race. That is no way to push for equality among people. What I am trying to say is listen: The reason that the other audience member heard what he thought he heard was because *historically* his skin color qualifies him as the one to blame. Not listening to others may keep him trapped in that box because his mind knows no other way.

Don't we ever stop and think that if we listened to the problems that the solutions we offer would be less offensive? We are so used to taking what people say and the way they live and taking it out of context. Even then after we take it out of the context from which it was spoken or in which it happened we interpret it according to

our own experiences. What happens when we stop reading into things and start reading what is already there? Will people start to see beyond the color line and look far enough to see the people line? He said why isn't it about "people" and what happened to "people"? I say because "people" aren't experiencing the same things. Sometimes people go through things that may not be happening across the board. Sit back and think about all the times you have dismissed even the idea of something being about race. It is so much easier to say it's about money or socioeconomic issues. Think of it this way, when you mention something that you would say has to do with being impoverished, poor, less fortunate, or any other words used to describe an impoverished something, exchange that word with black and then change it with white. Does it fit? Why or why not? Now I know many of the readers are going to be thinking of ways to make me slip up on this when asking questions during the presentation. Then think to yourself, is this yet another form of denial? Think about it, and believe that I have.

Tourism (continued from pg.4)

of the Big Bad Wolf in the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood. "Oh my tour bus what large windows you have"—"all the better to see you with my dear!" I wasn't there to see poor people. No! I was there to learn and share my experiences with people like Sommy in a manner that was face to face, not masked by tinted windows. When driving through the lower Ninth Ward we passed the section where Habitat for Humanity (sponsored by celebrities like Brad Pitt) started rebuilding efforts alongside properties where people were living. I shrank in my seat as sad faces and blank stares took aim at me, but were harmlessly deflected by the armor of the van. I felt misunderstood. I feared misunderstanding. I can only imagine that the people we drove by must have also felt misunderstood. I wasn't alone.

I think that our week-long trip to New Orleans has helped to organize my thoughts and situate my feelings in broader perspective, as well as reveal a common truth of my experiences in Over-the-Rhine.

"You cannot deal with the poor at arm's length." Academic Service Learning nurtures the idea of being uncomfortably close in terms of serving, living, learning, and most importantly, thinking. The prospect of presenting what I have learned over the course of an entire semester is rather intimidating when I have a hard time answering simple questions like, "How is it going?" However, I feel confident in saying that I have learned that interaction is the key component to service learning and to understanding. When we immerse ourselves in the situations of those we serve and take a stroll in their shoes, we form a connection that encourages us to try on a new perspective. I will not fully be a part of the Over-the-Rhine Community in my remaining two months of the semester, nor will I be one of the thousands of families affected by Hurricane Katrina and the levees breaking, but I know that my efforts to come face to face with others will ensure that when I leave, I won't be leaving both of us empty handed.

Wednesday (continued from pg. 3)

look up charts and call parents to verify information for a research project focusing on developmental delays. At 2 p.m., I leave Crossroad and make the trek back to the apartment. I am greeted by the more-forward-than-I-am-used-to calls of strangers I pass on the four-block journey home.

Homework and hanging out with the other students and our neighbors fills the three hours between service and dinner. After a delicious meal, we walk to Choices Café for our 6 p.m. history class with Dr. Anderson,

our fearless leader, and the five non-service-learning fellow students. We discuss slavery and its implications as part of the African American Struggle for Equality, the title and focus of the course. After class, we stroll home and get caught up in conversations with the people hanging out near our stoop. I manage to finish the homework for Thursday's on-campus classes before falling asleep as soon as I lay down for bed. Today has been a fun-filled and busy day, as usual, and I need to rest for tomorrow.