

Connecting the dots: Destroying our city's backbone by the gentrification of long-time Indianapolis urban neighborhoods

"For a span of my memory this has been a city of opposing wills, two faces firmly set toward different directions—one covertly determined to maintain the status quo, to continually block any access to power, or to parity; the other advocating an active morality and its right to inclusion as an equal entity rather than a colonized one. This has been a city of perpetual confrontation, however cloaked, between the powerless and those who influence, control, and engineer the city's movement in the inexorable and often ruthless march toward 'greatness.'"

~ Mari Evans on Indianapolis, *Clarity as Concept*

Over the last few years, Indianapolis has experienced the erasure of the culture and history of historically black and white urban neighborhoods. Why?

The Indianapolis establishment has set out to compete with other Midwestern cities for educated millennials and other professional workers they see as needed to bring our city solidly into the 21st Century. To the local status quo, these old, rundown and sorely neglected inner-city neighborhoods make Indy seem less attractive, thus, less competitive. In response, Indy's mainstream is not restoring and revitalizing these areas, but dismantling them, making urban refugees out of the residents.

The telling April 14 *Indy Star* story by investigative journalist Ko Lyn Cheang, "\$100M Elanco headquarters causing gentrification worry" ([news/local/marion-county/2022tur4y/04/12/elanco-indianapolis-headquarters-causing-gentrification-worry/7274769001/](https://www.indystar.com/news/local/marion-county/2022tur4y/04/12/elanco-indianapolis-headquarters-causing-gentrification-worry/7274769001/)) discloses the amount of wealth and power behind our city's continuing coloniality: the gentrification of its 3 square mile inner-city area.

This form of neo-colonialism is pushed by the intrusion of major big-money entities/projects (shown in parentheses), accelerating the gentrification of Indianapolis' inner-city: Indiana Ave/W. 10th St.

YMCA/Ransom Place (IUPUI); Fountain Square/Virginia Ave/Hosbrook St (Eli Lilly); Babe Denny/Concord/Old Southside (Colt's stadium); Riverside (16 Tech); and, Norwood (jail complex).

Though not linked to major spending projects taking place in other city areas, long-time urban black neighborhoods along E. 16th St. and both sides of College Ave areas north to Fall Creek are under the gentrification influence of the "Monon 16" initiative.

Gleaned from Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, original long-time neighborhoods like those above--before colonization by the suburban settler class of gentry--were the backbone of cities, giving its citizens a shared past, identity, and a sense of the common destiny.

So, what is happening?

Major Midwestern cities like Indianapolis are gentrifying the inner-city neighborhoods of the 20th century Industrial Age labor class, slowly moving them out, and preparing these same areas for the workers of the 21st Century Information Age.

Blinded, tragically, by this need to show Indy as viable and "hip" brought within its wake a distorted sense of progress that dismantled, by gentrification, much of our city's essential backbone. This mainstay was what gave Indianapolis its soul and flavor--a Southern way of life, both good and bad, that helped influence local writer Mari Evans to describe Indianapolis as "Up south" as she noted: "Many Black folk thought of Indianapolis as urban, 'Up South.' It was better than being 'down South,' but it retained many of the negative propositions of the deep South and was not yet enlightened or 'progressive' as the West or East Coast counterparts. Conservatism and racism were alive and compatible."

Will the Valley be gentrified?

It's just a matter of time before the 130 year-old Valley neighborhood of working-class whites will be gentrified. It's inevitable. Eli Lilly's

Elanco global history and corporate culture will displace The Valley's history and culture. And, once the complex opens, expect a boutique charter at school No. 47 for salaried Elanco employees.

What will be erased?

Historically, it was the blue collar workers from the Valley that did lots of the heavy lifting in factories, warehouses, construction, truck driving, restaurants, janitorial work, and the other common labor that built Indianapolis. Just as important, the Valley helped give our city its country flavor: language, music (country/rockabilly/bluegrass), cooking, churches, games, honky-tonks, and family and neighborhood ways of life.

Is Stringtown next?

Another white working-class metro Indy neighborhood, that's over a century old, is already being gentrified. Its country culture and history are well-known on the near-Westside. Like the Valley, its residents have influenced the essence of what makes Indianapolis, Indianapolis. They too have done a lot of the heavy lifting that has created and sustained our city. But, evidently, that doesn't matter, and years from now no one will know any better. Stringtown is simply too close to the IUPUI campus and the Eskenazi/IU/Veterans hospital complex. In fact, local developer Sam Brouger is investing \$15M in Stringtown, building 40 to 50 homes priced at \$250K to \$350K in addition to some mixed-use development: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2116007002>.

"The most frightening thing about Indianapolis is Indianapolis, the fact that it continues to undermine itself by being someone other than what it is or who it is."
~ Transcript from Callers #43-#47, *The Manufactured History of Indianapolis* (Reeves, 2013)

A city of perpetual adolescence

As our city goes through the current stages of gentrification, intending to build a finer Indianapolis, this initiates what has been the M.O. of our town: a perpetual adolescent city trying to find itself--trying on

different personas via some Madison Avenue "branding" campaign. The new brand works for awhile, but fades due to lack of authenticity.

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As Indianapolis tries to "progress," be hip, have pride, and especially have the gravitas of other mid-western cities--and, as "...those who influence, control, and engineer the city's movement in the inexorable and often ruthless march toward 'greatness'" like Mari Evan warns--Indy has acquired a hubris, making it blind to the old adage that applies here, "When you got what you wanted, you lost what you had."

This has manifested in a distorted ethics convincing us we must be better than others. Such adolescent self-importance, arising from our tragic insecurities, continues to influence and maintain our dozing city: Naptown.

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