

Rebirth of Over-the-Rhine

Documentary film synopsis

“In all of America, there is no more promising an urban area for revitalization than . . . Over-the-Rhine.”

— Arthur Frommer, 1993

Cincinnati’s historic inner-city core—Over-the-Rhine—is at a critical point.

History. This once-bustling community of German beer brewers and pork packers built the nation’s largest collection of 19th-century Italianate architecture. It is an expansive architectural gem, but today it has lost about half of its historic buildings. Preservationists call it a race against time.

Poverty. Over-the-Rhine is a crucible of poverty, which has exacted a human toll: crime, drugs, and homelessness persist. Its mean streets were featured in the Oscar-winning film *Traffic*: Michael Douglas played the US drug czar whose daughter was drawn to the dismal heroin dens of Over-the-Rhine. In 2001, race riots garnered national attention. The neighborhood continued its decline.

Transformation. But today, change is in the air. In the past five years alone, an unprecedented \$100 million of private and public investment has flowed into Over-the-Rhine. Arts organizations, restaurants, and retail shops are breathing new life into the barren shells of 19th century wonders. Previously hesitant private and public developers are now wagering fortunes and reputations on the revitalization. But as one developer says, “There is no guarantee it will work.”

The Heart. The epicenter is Washington Park. This regal green space is framed by the city’s most historic arts buildings. A century ago, it was considered a showcase park of the Midwest. Today, however, the park showcases not the city’s grandeur, but rather the desolation of the downtrodden. Washington Park is a magnet for local and out-of-town homeless people and drug addicts. For them, the park is a refuge—for now.

The Tipping Point. At the south end of Washington Park, the ambitious new School for Creative & Performing Arts has opened up, adjacent to a homeless shelter with a proud history of social advocacy. As one homeless man said, “Now that they’re building this school here, they gonna try to put us outta the park.” Equally good-willed people advocate opposed positions. Now, around the park’s periphery, previously struggling businesses have begun to see new customers, and school-children have begun to re-appear.

Rebirth of Over-the-Rhine. Shot from 2009-2012 in and around Washington Park, *Rebirth of Over-the-Rhine* chronicles the lives of residents, developers and architects, social service providers, a spiritual leader, business owners, and a city council member. As summer turns to fall, Washington Park’s renovation begins. The first step is exhuming bodies from below the parkland, remnants of a forgotten German cemetery. Meanwhile, years of pent-up dreams, convictions, and personal frustrations are surfacing as well. Amidst revitalization, some people grapple with loss, others are inspired by hope, and one man seeks redemption.

Contact: Director/DP Melissa Godoy: 513-550-2227, melissagodoy@mac.com
Producer/Editor Steve Dorst: 202-258-9612, steve@dorstmediaworks.com
Producer Joe Brinker: 646-467-1777, joebrinker@yahoo.com