

# **UNDERSTANDING SPACE IN AN ORDINARY CITY**

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by  
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UNDERSTANDING SPACE IN AN ORDINARY CITY

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A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Sociology

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## Chapter 1: Coming to Spaces

In this dissertation, I emphasize the ordinary city (Robinson, 2006) as a place for building social justice, a place of possibility, and a place where we can see the tensions and frictions (Tsing, 2004) between the stability of social structure and the fluidity of human action. In this context, the ordinary city emerges as a site of innovation and a point for connecting, synthesizing, simplifying, and grounding concepts of space and participation as I move through the lenses of perceived, conceived, and lived (Lefebvre, 1991) in a discussion of the City of Columbia, Missouri.

At the level of conceived, I outline a few of the key themes that return repeatedly in Columbia's history, creating the contours of the stage upon which today's community lives and imagines its own future. Through highlighting these trends we can see the best and worst of this ordinary city emerge. While Columbia is a highly educated and theoretically progressive community, it has never escaped the seemingly permanent facts of inequality.

At the level of perceived, I tell a story of the "Imagine Columbia's Future" visioning process through which over 1,000 citizens developed goals and "action plans" for the future of the city. Here I focus on the tensions between the promises of ongoing democratic participation and the organization of the structures of the process that rushed and alienated participants. Here we can see the moments where structure and action meet as participants imagine what they want for the future of this space.

At the level of lived, I focus on the way people experience of the city in the present. Through the documentation of the everyday life of a wide variety of community members in photo journals, I work to illuminate the best and the worst

of living and experiencing Columbia. Where the history of the community is largely written and can be utilized for a variety of competing narratives and the visioning process worked to create a unified concept for the future, these photo journals help to complete a picture of Columbia, expanding our understanding of the people that make up the community.

I work to develop a story of the *processes* that have led to the City of Columbia as it currently exists and how these and other processes can lead us into the future. Embedding this study of the processes of city creation within both the theoretical and practical paradigms of democratic practice has helped me toward a broader understanding of political participation and more inclusive concepts of cityspace. I have made it one of my goals here to renew or recreate some of the bridges between the work done by academics and the needs of the community. While many sciences are rooted in and have historically delivered on the promise of a brighter future, much of the work done in the world of academia today has become insular and self-serving, filling endless journals with endless material to never be read and writing with intentions that seem to benefit nothing more than a career. One of my key goals here in my roles as participant and consultant is to help in building and renewing these productive bridges that can and have existed between the academic world and the community. Where academic writing can often be inaccessible, participation and expertise can be usefully contributed to many situations.

I write about Columbia because, as a place, it has played an important role in shaping both my life and my research interests. As a long time resident, I feel responsible for making a contribution to the community and, as a sociologist, I am interested in contributing knowledge to and learning from local political processes. In the current work then, I am attempting to fuse the broad

theoretical world of academia with the more practical world of democratic dialogue. Infused with sociology, my life has led me to try to find ways to broaden my theoretical questions and focus my academic work on social struggles.

Locally, my interest was first piqued by a local development dispute surrounding the construction of a new Wal-Mart on West Broadway. I wondered why a fairly large segment of the community was unable to achieve their goal of stopping this particular development. As my research progressed, I found that very similar struggles against very similar big box developments occurred in a wide variety of communities. Rather than being able to unify against a global paradigm, these struggles are fragmented into local units and, in this context, fight against individual growth projects one at a time. Large scale social movements against local urban growth in fact seem impossible because the structure of our world creates communities that operate independently and in competition with each other over jobs, resources, and even people. In competing against the powerful interests of a unified international organization like Wal-Mart, these fragmented social movements are essentially powerless unless the legal framework to protect their interests exists *prior* to the specific land use dispute.

In assessing this process, I began to wonder what it would take to build justice into these negotiated places and spaces (in geographical, cognitive, social, discursive senses) in which we live. How are these places and spaces negotiated into existence in a world organized by capitalism? How can we make this process of negotiation more inclusive? How do these negotiated spaces reflect back upon us as we move through and within them? What barriers are preventing community members from participating in the processes of building cityspace? What are places and spaces anyway? What are the processes of

city building? What processes led to the “Columbia” that I know today? What processes can make Columbia into the sort of place community members want it to be tomorrow? How do others experience this cityspace called Columbia?

Serendipitously, as I began to ponder these questions the City of Columbia initiated a "visioning process" that came to be named "Imagine Columbia's Future." The impetus for this project emerged from a city-wide survey that indicated a strong desire for members of the community to have greater influence over the future of the city. While “visioning” as a method of engaging community members on city planning issues is receiving increasing attention in planning circles around the nation, the visioning process as community planning generated excitement and was *experienced* as new for many of the process participants I spoke with. This style of planning process engages community members in what are ideally constructive dialogues leading toward an agreed upon "vision for the future." In the most optimistic sense, this process worked to create a leveled space for dialogues that would allow everyone to participate in shaping the future of the community and it therefore interested me both in an academic sense and as a member of the community looking to contribute; as an academic I could engage with the problems of cityspace and democracy and as a member of the community I could contribute my skills as a teacher, facilitator, and knowledge worker.

I positioned myself close to this visioning process for several reasons. First, as I already mentioned, volunteering in the Columbia community is important to me as a long time resident. Second, working on this particular project as a facilitator put me in a place where I could contribute my skills effectively. Third, working to be a member of the vision committee put me inside of the visioning process and gave me the opportunity to participate in important

decision making processes. Through all of this work as a participant-observer with a naturalist mindset I have maintained an intimate and sometimes very emotional relationship with all but the formative stages of the visioning process. Positioning myself close to the everyday processes that constitute "The City of Columbia" not only made me feel better about contributing to the community in my ethnographic practice, it also drew me closer to understanding the contradiction between participatory democracy and capitalist bureaucracy. While the pressures of academia push my self-as-researcher away from what could be practical sociology the everyday structures of capitalism simultaneously press against my already desperate attempts to bring sociological knowledge into practice. By focusing on the process of spatial production in this work I illustrate the struggles between our social structures that press for stability and the work of building justice that calls for so much change.

Following the completion of the visioning process, I began to answer several of my other questions about the history of the community. Studying this history has helped me to understand the background for both the visioning process and the community more generally. While many of the participants in the visioning process experienced it as new, it was not the first time that the community had played a role in the development of some sort of plan for the future. As this history has revealed to me, there is a long term distrust that has emerged between community and government, making engagement difficult from the start.

As I continued to shape my understanding of cityspace, I needed a way to gather information on life in Columbia today. While the visioning process helped me understand what participants wanted the future to look like and the study of local historical trends helped me understand the stage upon which visioning

occurred, I was still lacking an understanding of what it is like for people to live in Columbia. Of course, I have my own ideas but that is one perspective in approximately 100,000 and I have no claim to authority. Seeing the work of Thomas (2005) and Auyero and Swistun (2009), I was inspired to have a diverse set of residents create photo journals to garner some access to the everyday life of Columbia. While this particular chapter does not discuss the problems of democratic process and space making, it does demonstrate the best and the worst of life in Columbia and can help us better understand exactly what sorts of processes we should be attempting and on what subjects.

Overall, this dissertation could be considered a spatial ethnography of sorts. By working to demonstrate and understand how this cityspace came to be what it is, how people live in this cityspace, and how this cityspace could be in the future, we can ask better questions about making our imagined future into reality. For the worlds of sociology and democratic participation, this approach can work to make academic work more relevant to the realities our communities face and it can expand the possibilities opened through citizen engagement processes more generally.

### *Outlining the Work*

Chapter 2, "The Possibilities of Cityspace," sets the theoretical stage for the rest of the work that follows. Through telling the story of coming to seeing space as perceived, conceived and lived, I show how a variety of knowledge workers have come to think about the life of cityspaces. In beginning to take apart the inner workings of any cityspace, fascinating complexities emerge. In cities we can assess and analyze both the emergent structures of capitalism and the ongoing processes of human action; the history of structure and action has left its mark on every corner of our world. Here I work to push forward a way of



thinking about this world that can help us in the project for social justice.

In Chapter 3, “Echos of the Past,” I discuss the historical aspect of understanding The City of Columbia. I offer highlights of the city's history to demonstrate some of the consistent frictions and tendencies. Through this set of vignettes we can begin to understand the social and physical shape of the cityspace known as Columbia. While Columbia has always claimed progressivism, it is clear that the gap between rich and poor is large and stands out in stark contrast from the claims of progress. In this chapter we can begin to see who constitutes the public at different points in time and, although the gap between wealthy and poor clearly remains large, it is also clear that the openness of local political process has increased over this history.

In Chapter 4, “Columbia Imagined,” I take a close up look at local political process and discuss the contours of the Imagine Columbia's Future visioning process. In this process the tensions between social structure and human agency emerge in the struggle between following the consultant's drive for process completion or the citizen's desires for continued dialogue. In the end, a negotiated and agreed upon vision was formed for the future of the city and it today continues to influence local governance.

In Chapter 5, “Living Columbia,” I offer a selection of photo journals created by members of this community. These photographs offer a look at the best and the worst of life in this cityspace and help to ground the history and the imagined future in the experience of reality. This chapter completes the work through of the lenses of perceived, conceived, and lived and brings the rest of the work to life.

While this case study, like most case studies, seems unique in many ways, the connections to knowledge, structure, and action throughout our world

and over time are extensive. In the concluding chapter, “New Beginnings”, I discuss these connections and the importance of changing the way we think about space. Through letting go of conceptual hierarchies and connecting with our communities we can work toward making the sociological perspective more socially salient. For those who would like to make the world a better place, a willingness to listen, observe, and adjust according to the situation at hand is becoming the ultimate key to social change.

## Chapter 2: The Possibilities of Cityspace

Through the combination of treating space as perceived, conceived, and lived, the processes of producing of space gains a certain degree of clarity (Lefebvre 1991). By sidestepping the tendency to treat capitalism only as a form of social control (see Davis, 1998 for the most extreme instance) and by developing an understanding of spaces as having developed in history, as being lived in the present, and as being imagined in the future (Lefebvre 1991), the contentious and collaborative moments that work to create space begin to emerge (Tsing2004). In studying social change, the tradition is to focus on moments of contention (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McAdam 1982) rather than moments of collaboration (Green 1999) and, because of this, there seems to exist a general sociological belief that change occurs only when contention is high. This study of collaborative practices and processes, on the other hand, marks the exploration of an area that is quite thin in the field of sociology.

I focus on the study of collaboration to help point us *away* from recreating spaces of inequality and *toward* creating spaces of justice. In the Frierian sense (2000), we must draw the oppressor and oppressed (and thus their bodies of knowledge) into conversation lest the oppressed just becomes the new oppressor. Instead of taking the fiercely critical approaches to society and social change that leave us trapped in Weber's "iron cage" (see Marcuse 1964 for instance), the study of collaboration can help us develop a more balanced perspective that leaves open at least a hint of possibility. This is a methodology of hope in that it reveals a way to move through conflict and toward resolutions.

I emplace this study of conflict and collaboration within cityspace, specifically, within the City of Columbia, Missouri. Studies of cityspace and

capitalist processes of development have been traditionally focused on a limited number of large metropolises (Smith 1996, Soja 2000). I work to undercut this hegemonic and incidentally eurocentric focus by demonstrating that development both varies and remains similar in heuristically important ways (Ofori-Amoah 2007) in, what Robinson (2006) has termed: *ordinary cities*. Despite wanting to take on this cosmopolitan stance the newness of this approach leaves gaps in the literature (that I work to fill), requiring me to draw from these metropolitan focused sources to a certain extent.

In this chapter I offer the theoretical contours of my perspective. I offer this literature review as a story that walks the reader down the paths of thought I have found myself walking because I believe the path itself is at least as important as its components. Within capitalism, Marx saw revolution. Within cityspace, I have come to see liberation through collaboration.

### *Capitalism, Control, and Cityspace*

Properly addressing my theoretical context requires a sort of an intellectual walkthrough of my experiences. Several years ago, Omi and Winant (1994) and Neil Smith (1996) oriented me toward the city as a space of racist third wave gentrification, or, to use Smith's language, the revanchist city. Omi and Winant look at the history of race relations as a way to place and conceptualize contemporary race relations and, in this, the shape of racism and the shape of the city (physical and regulatory) are quite closely tied together. As Omi and Winant note, the end of the civil rights movement and the failure of liberal policy to immediately fulfill the promise of equality has been met with a strong, conservative, anti-government backlash. This backlash has largely been expressed through the language of "deregulation" (although, more appropriately, it should be discussed as a process of reregulation) that has led cities into

competition against each other while simultaneously reframing central cities as degrading (in the sense of falling apart), dangerous, and untamed new frontiers.

Smith's urban frontier is a space that has been painted as a dark and urban "wild west," similar to the film noir of Avila's (2004) dark city. In these works we can see that the "white flight" from the dark city of Avila's LA created the suburban escape while the reaction to the wildness of the Smith's (also dark) revanchist NYC is an ongoing attempt to tame the new frontier. This gentrification project is not restricted to specific neighborhoods but is instead a generalized project in the processes of city development (Smith 2002) in which all plans are subject to an *unwritten* market logic that often works to privilege the landed elite (Logan and Molotch 1987). Regardless of how we choose to label market capitalism (industrial, post-industrial, neoliberal, etc.), it is an exclusionary market logic that organizes the ideologies of contemporary urbanism and, therefore, our spaces. In the gentrification project, property values increase as large numbers of wealthy and generally white people move into newly colonized areas, simultaneously pushing the poor and largely minority populations outward away from opportunity while creating a rent gap (Smith 1996).

We can also find that in places like a gated suburb or the Mall of America, there are both overt and Foucaultian (1977) practices of social and spatial exclusion that play out in much the same manner as they have in Los Angeles (Davis 1998) or New York City (Smith 1996). In the names of property, safety, and security (Lang and Danielsen 1997, O'Dougherty 2006), these places present smiling faces that tell certain people they are not allowed to be in their spaces. Unsurprisingly, the people who are told they cannot stay in these places of purity and consumption are frequently members of the lower class, an unfavorable sexuality, a racial minority, an unruly teenager, or any of the many

"others" of western culture. The image these places present is one of modernist moral superiority and their practices exist parallel to the inequalities which have already been so thoroughly documented (Sibley 1995).

In producing the spaces that are generally preferred by the wealthy, we create "geographies of exclusion" (Sibley 1995) that spatialize our social practices and alienate the excluded. In other words, both real and imagined communities find their common source in unequal and alienating social and spatial relationships rooted in modernist capitalist ideologies and woven with fear of the other (Avila 2004). Action within and around these spaces is organized toward purification, enclosure, exclusion, and the alienation of those who most need help (Mitchell 2003). The space of exclusion then comes to appear both natural and safe in the eyes of the privileged while the excluded simply melt into air and disappear from sight and mind. Here we can also see Zerubavel's (1991) discussion of culture and classification emerge as he draws our attention to the culturally situated barriers between what is in and what is out. As we come to learn how to classify, we also learn to categorize the sacred and the profane (what to eat and what not to eat, who to talk to and who not to talk to, where to go and where not to go, etc). These are simple distinctions but they do a great deal of work in organizing the way we think about and create cityspaces.

As I considered the way we create cityspaces through these lenses, I found myself disillusioned by the postmodernism that "cultivates... a conception of the urban fabric as necessarily fragmented, a 'palimpsest' of past forms superimposed upon each other, and a 'collage' of current uses, many of which may be ephemeral" (Harvey 1991, 67). Harvey's treatment of space as having melted into air left me feeling like something was missing. What seems to happen, at least with a strong interpretation of postmodernism, is a disconnection

from the present and from the realness of the experience of space as lived, making the city into something *purely* historical and ephemeral. The point here is to indicate that, while postmodern theories can be understood as emerging from a condition of rootlessness, using this absence as your ontological root makes the concept of space nearly impossible to work with, resulting in both a loss of space as lived and an erasure of agency from cityspace.

While Soja's Postmetropolis (2000) has some similar tendencies, overall, it helped me to understand and apply Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualization of the city as perceived (spatial practice, practices), conceived (representations of space, theories), and lived (representational space, experiences). Through Soja's application of six discourses, I came to see specifically how, through history, capitalism has left a physical impression on the shape of the city in the same way that it has left an impression on our system of social stratification. The nature of inequalities is reflected not only in the amounts of resources available across class lines but in the way that our physical spaces are constructed. Gentrification and segregation are two clear historical moments through which this relationship can be expressed through countless maps of the physical separations between rich and poor (Smith 1996, 2002; Soja 2000). Through this, I also came to see the city as closely tied into the processes of globalization (Sassen 1998). Without a place for inequalities to emerge, without a place for trade to occur, and without a place for people to meet and discuss how it is they plan to extract resources, there can be no globalization. The city then, is one of the key places in which globalization can be studied.

#### *From the Local to the Global and Back Again*

The obvious and apparent closeness of business and government at the local, national, and international levels indicates that Logan and Molotch's (1987)

conclusions still hold true today; furthermore, they show how, over time, the reregulation process has led to cities now being pitted against each other in competition. The advantage that capitalists have maintained throughout this historical process is quite stunning. Thus, the tension between the global and the local in the globalization process is important for both drawing the influence of capitalism out to the global system level and emplacing this global process in the everyday lived environments of cityspace.

While McMichael's Development and Social Change (2003) does not emphasize the city as an analytical category, cities are where much of the process of globalization has been happening (Sassen1998). Although a great deal could be devoted to outlining the role of the development and globalization processes in the city, the key points here are the *clear history* of intense exploitation that has been necessary to create and maintain global capitalism and the measurement of *all things* on an economic yardstick; both of which have foisted an impossible game of catch-up on all those considered traditional (McMichael 2003). As we look at this unbalanced game, we can see the a pressure to conform to the rules of global capitalism at all scales.

Where this work helped to solidify my understanding of both the presence and pressure of globalization, Sassen's Globalization and its Discontents (1998) brought me to both situating globalization in the city and returning some power to the actors that constitute the city. Sassen works to emplace globalization in major metropolitan areas that she calls "world-cities"; importantly, she also situates these world-cities as sites of great cosmopolitanism, cultural intermixing, and the primary point of entry for new groups into capitalism and globalization and therefore also as the primary point of resistance to the impacts of the globalization project. While Sassen is working to deconstruct these relations of



domination in such a way as to expand the analytic terrain of studies of global economy and simultaneously empower people with the possibility of resistance through place focused strategies (both of which she does quite well), her focus leads her to highlight world-cities as the *only* location of the place-specific processes of globalization.

### *Modernity and the Ordinary City*

Importantly, the *overarching tendencies* in studies focused on the places we inhabit have been to either seek out the "core" metropolises or the smallest and remotest places of the world that have been labeled primitive or peripheral. While many authors have noted that inequalities and poverty are almost always greater in the metropolises of our world (Gladstone and Fainstein 2003), few, particularly among sociologists, have noted that these dynamics both vary and remain similar in important and conceptually interesting ways in the smaller cities (Ofori-Amoah 2007) that fall somewhere in the area between traditional and global ways of knowing and experiencing cityspace. In Jennifer Robinson's (2006) formulation, these places are known as "ordinary cities"; a compelling and well organized argument for flattening this spatial hierarchy.

“Ordinary cities then – and that means all cities – are understood to be diverse, creative, modern and distinctive with the possibility to imagine (within the not-inconsiderable constraints of contestations and uneven power relations) their own futures and distinctive forms of cityness” (Robinson, 110).

Robinson works to take the ideas of globalization and the concepts of the nature of the city and reorganize them instead of rescale them. Instead of arguing that less happens in smaller places, she argues that *all* places are a part of the chains and flows that constitute international capitalism and organize the cityspaces in which we conduct our daily lives.

In this compelling argument, Robinson treats the standard scholarship of cityspace as both eurocentric and deeply embedded in modernity. Modernity (as concept and state of being) and modernization (as concept/process) are tied to long histories of domination and exclusion of colonial people by western imperial powers (Lévi-Strauss 1973). Modernity, in this sense, has attempted hegemonic control of the life-worlds, minds, spirits, and beings of all people and ideas it considers not modern and has historically treated "western" ways of knowing and being as innately superior to the ways of knowing and being from any place that is "not modern." Through this lens, modernity is not necessarily a wonderful and enlightening academic and social tradition; instead, it has also controlled, dominated, and excluded the ideas and practices of those considered traditional.

Instead of seeing many places with diverse possibilities and great histories of innovation, modernity paints only very few people, spaces, and times as sites of innovation and creativity. Through painting "traditional" lifestyles as primitive, modernity makes the elimination of the primitive a primary goal. The ontology of modernity is one in which history is only a unitary and linear development process that, eventually, all humans must go through; therefore, the elimination of the primitive will only come through showing others how to modernize *and by converting* them to a modernist lifestyle *by force* if necessary (Levii-Strauss 1973). Modern *man* believes he is a *parent* (in the masculine, domineering sense) to the traditional world, born only to *show them* the light (Bourdieu 2001). Thus, development is a process that can only lead to modernity, leaving any other cultural forms in the waiting rooms of history. In the mind of a pure modernist, modernization can only be achieved by following the path of European civilization; history is a series of one-way streets in which *other* civilizations have been going the wrong direction or have not yet reached their

western destination.

While many contemporary theorists, writers, and actors (in the sociological sense) have attempted to move past the hegemonic ideologies and practices surrounding cityspace, their minds often remain colonized by modernist thinking. Despite resisting the ideologies of our forefathers, this trap leads many not away from, but toward the creation of increasingly elaborate dichotomies and hierarchies (Robinson 2006). Sassen's (1998) work on the world city is perhaps the best example here. Despite being a well-written critical analysis of life in the urban metropolis, treating the world city as the center of globalization excludes "the diverse spatialities of ordinary cities" (Robinson 2006) from the field of consideration.

Urban theory has historically been organized with the ideological forces of modernity lurking in the background. By choosing to focus on a place that can be considered ordinary, I am simultaneously looking into largely untreated spaces and working against the grain of the approach that has pointed the focus of so many urban theorists almost exclusively toward the great metropolises of the world (Sassen 1998; Smith 1996; Soja 2000). Furthermore, in a methodological sense, choosing to focus on this smaller ordinary city allows me to get closer to the whole of "Columbia" with greater ease than a similar attempt directed at any given metropolis. Whereas global cities have, for instance, international airports, Columbia has a regional airport; yet, this community also has a major research one university. While smallness, even perceived, is often characterized as unimportant or uninteresting, the point is to indicate that this is one of many ordinary places touched by the tension between modernist global pressures and the maintenance of traditional local characteristics.

The study of the ordinary city then becomes the study of how these social

processes have played out in so many different places, the study of the diversity we can find within the globalization project and the reformulation and extension of urban theory. This cosmopolitan point of view helps to break the hierarchies that divide big from small and opens us to the possibilities that exist within the places we have made analytically unimportant. When we treat these cityspaces as perceived in history, conceived for the future, and lived in the present (Lefebvre 1991), *all places* become the site of innovation, creativity, and resistance.

### *Structure, Action, and Space*

In all this, I was left with an almost purely structural theoretical arrangement; largely, the works I have illustrated here do not cover what *people* have *done* to make spaces. Spaces have apparently become real through history as a consequence of the existence of structures of capitalism. To me, this explanation is important but thin and it was through a seeming detour into identity studies where I found the beginnings of my answer. Gubrium and Holstein's work (1997, 1999, 2001) shaped my understanding of the self as a crucial access point into the constitution of the social world. In this work we see the constitution of identity in the meeting of discursive practice and discourses-in-practice. This feedback loop between what can loosely be called agency and structure constitutes the selves that we organize our lives around. Rather than philosophizing about what power is, I became more interested in how power is lived and constituted in action.

Thus, instead of treating space as *either* a simple container for social relations *or* as something so fluid it cannot be treated empirically, I argue that space must be treated as reflexive, as simultaneously old and new, as simultaneously concrete and fluid. In an ongoing critique of spatial production

that, in my formulation, has culminated through Marx (1976), Lefebvre (1991), Harvey (1996), Soja (2000), Dikeç (2001), Massey (1992), and Nowicka (2006), space is treated as both structured and unsettled. In this, space serves as a "container" only in the sense of being a location for the maintenance of the ongoing tension between mobility and stability, structure and action, form and formlessness, constraint and liberation, etc. While there are clearly concrete elements to space (a building, a road, or geometry), there are also elements that are clearly fluid (discourse, ideas, practices), and there is fluid in the concrete and concrete in the fluid.

Change in this environment occurs as a process full of tension. This seemingly contradictory formulation makes accounts, for instance, through noting the irregularity of the processes of social change (Nowicka 2006). The point here is not only to indicate the coexistence of multiple accounts but to indicate the impossibility of locating these shifts between stability and change in space-time with any sort of precision. We must instead note that the change *process* was and is rife with *tensions* between the old and new; furthermore, in constructing our stories and categories, we actively highlight the moments that offer clarity to our understandings of the old and the new.

A focus on only stability or change leaves us with explanations that only serve to support the careers of their creators. Instead of following either one of these two paths, I work to forge ahead simultaneously grounded in both by treating space as perceived, conceived, and lived (Lefebvre 1991, Soja 2000). Through working toward deepening our understanding of the scientific notions of space, discourses on space, and practices in space I work toward developing more holistic notions of space and its part in our life-world. Lefebvre importantly focuses us on the rhythms of everyday life, noting that we must turn our attention

to the practices that constitute space when pursuing the perceived, conceived, and lived; offering the agent a significant role in the production of space. In Lefebvre's notions of the city as an oeuvre in which everyone participates, we find "the right to the city" (1991), where he argues that, since everyone participates in making the city, everyone should have equal access to the development and creation of this work. In more recent work from Mitchell (2003) we find this concept of the right to the city concretized when he argues that every move to regulate cityspace is an exclusionary move organized toward closing off the city to particular people. In the context of his focused discussion of the criminalization of homelessness this argument makes perfect sense; moves to criminalize homelessness are overtly moves to use regulation in order to exclude the homeless from any form of participation in the production of cityspace.

On the other hand, I argue here that control does not necessarily require exclusion. In the same way that "the free market" was created through regulatory steps to control the economy (Polanyi 1973), the city has been created through concrete regulatory steps organized toward controlling cityspace. In the same way that a market exists through the steps taken to organize, harbor, and direct it, a discourse, practice, or space exists because of the boundaries that demarcate the edges of these discourses, practices, and spaces. In a linguistic and practical sense, we understand one thing by differentiating it from other things (Zerubavel 1991). We, for instance, use a specific set of regulatory structures that work toward inscribing a normative differentiation on all things. While these structures appear stable, they are created and maintained in the ongoing reflexive, situated, and performative processes of social and spatial practice (Thomas 2005). While action shapes space, practice, and structure, it does so in a process that is, as Nowicka (2006) noted, flawed and rife with

contradiction, tension, contestation, and competition.

The point here is to emphasize that control is not inherently destructive and exclusionary. As an analytical category, our spatial practices can serve as a point of access to understanding our culture (Bourdieu 2006) and, in this respect, these practices can work in both the direction of oppression and alienation and in the direction of liberation and deep democratic dialogue (Green 1999). The goal here then, is to work toward understanding the sorts of spatial control that, instead of instituting an insidious Foucaultian discipline (1977), organize inclusion in the ongoing project for, in Dikeç's (2001) use of Balibar, *égaliberté*. In search of a universal bond of solidarity, *égaliberté* works to unify equality and freedom through the reformulation of the spatial practices of the city. Instead of working through exclusion, as western spatial regulation around space has chiefly done in the past and present, a space of *égaliberté* works toward the inclusion of all possibility.

As a radical (re)formulation of space, this approach can help us move beyond treating space as *either* fixed structure or ungraspable liquid, as *either* a container or nothingness. Space can be treated as something we make in conditions we do not choose; as something simultaneously past, present and future; as something that offers the possibility for resistance to domination. It is liberating in this respect to think that, instead of facing some impenetrable wall of social structure, we constantly work to create and maintain space and can therefore create our own justice.

### *Justice and the Practical Imagination*

The difficulty with the approaches outlined so far is that the authors generally seem to write with a detachment from lived experience. A great deal of these authors speak of making the world more just, but few explicitly deal with

the problems of making this justice real. Instead, the creation of justice seems to be understood as something of an eventual outcome that is to emerge from the realizations of an author's work and the projects it inspires. Beyond theorists of space and the city, we can see this same tendency reflected in those who write specifically about justice.

Habermas perhaps marks the best example in this instance. While his work has served as an inspiration and is almost entirely focused on building an inclusive and broad public sphere, the work itself is purely theoretical, as if the theorization of a transcendent inclusive structure will create a just reality. The transcendental justice projects of, for instance, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991) and *Toward a Rational Society* (1970) are thought provoking, but their ideals don't translate cleanly into practice. An expanded public sphere would certainly help us develop a more just society but the simple expansion of a sphere does not necessarily and automatically mean that this sphere is just and inclusive. What comes out of Habermas' overall schema for pursuing justice is an expectation that the establishment of a public sphere composed of reasonable persons will have just outcomes. Importantly here, this structurally perfect public sphere that is implied in Habermas' schema does not allow for multiple competing perspectives to exist simultaneously. Instead, this treatment of justice assumes that through rational dialogue in a structured public sphere, a single agreement on principles will be reached (Sen 2009). While he has been quite influential and has explicitly worked quite hard for justice, Habermas has a quite imperialism that emerges in this light.

On the other hand, Amartya Sen argues for rooting the idea of justice in social choice theory. As outlined in *The Idea of Justice* (2009), this approach utilizes both comparative and transcendental perspectives, recognizes the



plurality of competing principles, allows and facilitates the re-examination of these foundational principles, permits the partial resolution of complex issues, arrives “at overall judgements... based on a diversity of perspectives and issues” (Sen 2009, 109), emphasizes precise articulation and reasoning, and seeks public reasoning in decision-making processes. The concrete difference between the institutional focus of the transcendental approaches and the broader focus of Sen's social choice theory seems to lie in the pursuit of a truly just society with a willingness to be wrong and take new directions based on new information. Importantly here, this public sphere allows for coexisting competing principles. With an emphasis on the capabilities of the people in a given space, this approach is valuable in considering how to ground theories of justice.

For me, Lefebvre (1991, 2004) is an obvious point in which the politicization of space and the organization of justice into concepts of space is an explicit focus. As I have already described, Lefebvre argues that an inclusive city-based public sphere would do a great deal to generate social justice in our cities. Since everybody plays a part in the construction of the city everybody has a clear right to participate fully in the deliberations over the creation and maintenance of cityspace. In this respect, we don't have to seek a transcendent space of agreement, instead, we have to seek an inclusive space of dialogue and deliberation. Here I briefly discuss several resources that offer us access to the politicization of space and therefore offer ways to think about treating cityspace as a location for the creation of social justice.

In “Politics and Space/Time,” (1992) Doreen Massey works to treat space as integrally connected with time and as constructed out of interrelations and interactions at all scales. While these implications are really nothing new in this context, this particular construction is focused on politicizing space. Space in this

sense is not something that just is; instead, just like identity, spaces emerge in realtime as constructed through social relationships. In the theoretical sense then, the construction of just spaces is a political project which requires the sorts of broad and inclusive dialogue outlined by Sen.

Importantly here, Tsing's Friction (2004) concretizes global interactions within specific and actual events instead of abstractions. Tsing operates across implicitly spatial “global chains of connection” and, in all senses, is concerned with justice. The key point here, is that the friction which occurs when two culturally divergent groups meet can be a productive and justice building encounter, a destructive encounter, or both. The key to making these interactions productive comes in working collaboratively while the key to making destructive encounters comes in the domination of others. This theme of collaboration emerges repeatedly in these works that emphasize justice and, as I see it, is the key to developing projects of justice. In this respect, justice as an outcome requires no complex definition because it is realized as an achievement of collaboration, in working through difficult issues.

Throughout his work, Mitchell treats the creation of justice as the focal endpoint. In fact, in The People's Property (Staeheli and Mitchell 2007), the authors argue that the book itself is an attempt at intervention; an attempt both to ground theories of space in actual regulations and to argue for a set of regulations that would be more just and inclusive. Furthermore, in The Right to the City (2003), Mitchell argues for a broad and inclusive public sphere in the city and, in the vein of Dikeç's (2001) “Justice and the Spatial Imagination”, for a respect to difference in this pursuit of justice. This difference respecting conception of justice, it would seem, must take a cosmopolitan form if it is to function.

Perhaps most important here in emphasizing cosmopolitan collaboration is Green's (1999), Deep Democracy, which is most clearly oriented toward justice in its overall theme and methodological approach. While the *argument* for a deeper democracy is fairly simple the *actual work* of deepening is difficult. Along the same lines as Lefebvre (1991), Mitchell (2003), and Sen (2009), Green argues for the reconstruction of the public square to integrate broad political participation into everyday life. Most primarily, she argues for the *emplacement* of the social to combat the placelessness that dominates contemporary political engagement. By this she is calling for the development of attachments that compel the public to engage collaboratively in the work of shaping their everyday lives. For her analytic example she utilizes a visioning process in which she participated to describe how attachments to place (i.e. the love of community) encourage parties in dispute to engage in the creation of space.

In trying to construct these meaningful and productive collaborative processes there are fairly consistent guidelines across a wide variety of resources. From the academic perspective, Fung (2002, 2003) argues for a simultaneous bottom-up, or citizen driven, and top-down, or generally government driven, governance to solve the "problem of the public". In working to build an inclusive public dialogue, it is important to work within welcoming neutral spaces like schools where many can be comfortable and, in this sense, the space itself must play a role as welcomer and leveler. This openness (or at least this impression of openness) gives the participants in a dialogue process the sense that they can speak on equal ground with others. While the setup will vary depending on the number of participants or the complexity of the issue at hand, it is generally good practice to use a process in which smaller groups work on specific issues or tasks and report back to the group at large for feedback in

repeating cycles. These waves of working and reporting give participants the opportunity to move between groups if they feel so inclined and, in this way, a sort of focused cross pollination can keep all the groups working toward common goals. When working with longer term processes and when properly facilitated, groups will develop patterns of communication that help them toward practical resolution.

One practical perspective, “The World Cafe,” uses the following set of guidelines to help everyone participate in a collaborative environment: focus on what matters, contribute your thinking, speak your mind and heart, listen to understand, link and connect ideas, listen together for insights and deeper questions, play, doodle draw, have fun ([www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)). A discursive space of this sort is organized to facilitate dialogue and help different people feel comfortable as contributors by inviting all modes of expression and being open to questions. If the process is going to be contentious, trained facilitators who can help people work toward the resolution of difficult issues should be present. We can see the importance of process design emerge in Chapter 4 as I discuss the visioning process in which I participated.

It is easy to talk about the *ideal* shape of public participation but its *actual execution* runs into significant and consistent barriers; yet, if we hold this argument for establishing practices of justice in the everyday as a goal and work toward including all those who exist within a given place in the process of deciding what happens in, around, and to that place, then we are integrating democracy into the everyday life of every person. As Green (1999) argues, inclusive democracy requires an attachment to places to garner participation and, for this to be a truly global realization of justice, this attachment will have to happen at all scales. We clearly require, as Sen (2009) puts it, great social

realizations before we reach this destination.

Green (1999) makes a compelling argument that the academic or researcher may perhaps serve their greatest role as educator or consultant. In the role of educator, we can work toward developing in our students the ideals of justice, an interest in collaboration, and a desire to participate in and work toward the opening of political processes. In the role of consultant, both in our research and in our daily political participation, we can confer with all people on what it is they consider problematic, where it is we think they may do well to look in addition or instead, and what we think may work to help them resolve problems. Surely this list of consulting roles is not exhaustive but it should illustrate the point that we are in a particular position in which we have had the great fortune to learn about political processes, social stratification, urban development, the shape of the public sphere, and more. For me, the result of being in such a position is the responsibility to gather, spread, and implement knowledge and experience.

Perhaps the most difficult problem that faces us in the creation of a just public sphere on the global level is that of cosmopolitanism. While nearly everyone discussed here argues for the need to understand and respect a diversity of cultures, the need to create a shared consciousness that respects difference, and the need to involve everyone in collaboration, the barriers to such a cosmopolitanism are quite strong. The simplest way to illustrate this point in the academic world is in the attempt to find articles from a journal outside of the country, let alone across a language barrier. The idea of cosmopolitanism is a good one, but achieving a multicultural and multinational point of view, even with the immensity and speed of today's global communications network, is possible for only a select few. This elite group of global citizens could serve as an access

point for a broader group of citizens to achieve cosmopolitanism, but, until then, we have only the force of organization, the hope of possibility, and the determination to overcome the challenges we face in order to maintain the possibility for all to access their version of the good life.

The ordinary city in this context becomes a place for building justice, a place with possibility, and a place where we can study the frictions between structure and resistance, stability and change. Thus, within the places we reside there is a possibility for new performances and new structures in the creation of new spaces of justice.

### Chapter 3: Echos of the Past

In this chapter I begin to develop an understanding of The City of Columbia as perceived by offering some general themes that appear consistently across the history of the city. Through understanding these themes we can begin to see how the city came to be what it is today in both the social and physical senses. Without an understanding of the past, there can be no clear path into the future and therefore no way to clearly articulate any form of social justice in the everyday creation of cityspace.

First, I discuss the both the earliest settlers to the area and the racial formations of Columbia. In this discussion I outline what may be the most crucial of the frictions that run across this city's history; particularly, the gap between the *rhetoric* of equality and the *reality* of inequality. In this friction we can see both the invisibility of of the underprivileged and the overall utilitarian reduction in inequality over time. While it is easy to simply say that institutional racism is an ever present and impenetrable barrier to equality, we must also admit that there has been progress toward greater equality. In looking toward these frictions then, it is important to simultaneously see both inequality and progress.

Second, I outline a few elements of the emphasis on education and civic responsibility that flows through the history of Columbia. While we can see consistent and pervasive inequalities throughout the history of the city, we can also see the consistent promise *and achievement* of progress toward the bright future so many have imagined. In a similar fashion to much of world history, the scope of who counts as a member of the public has expanded. Thus, as the scope of who gets to be counted as a citizen broadens in the field of local progressive rhetoric, we can see that progress begins to reach a greater portion

of the population. Although it is important to consider the meaning and content of “progress”, it is beyond the scope of the work at hand.

Third, I launch into a discussion of the history of planning. Through the use of city plans, I demonstrate how the shape of cityspace has emerged in the decisions made during the contentious and collaborative processes that included planners and, further down the historical time line, citizens. The key friction between the rhetoric of equality and the reality of inequality becomes apparent through an analytical example found in the “Land Clearance Redevelopment Authority” of the 1950's and 60's. In this story that many members of the public continue to utilize for various contradictory narratives, we can see the drafting and implementation of city plans laying the foundations of the central city as I have always known it.

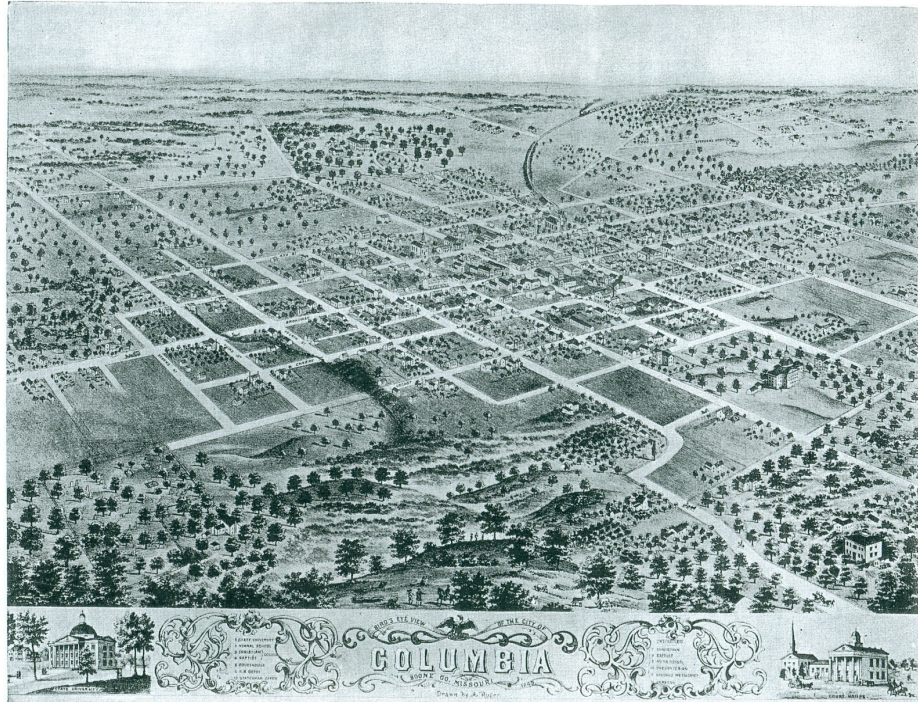
Finally, through a discussion of the move from a council-mayor to a council-manager form of government I discuss the evolution of the structure of governance in Columbia. In this historical vignette we can see the development of citizen distrust directed toward government, revealing the frictions between ideas of efficiency and concepts of democracy. This story continues to haunt the community in new forms today and, interestingly enough, the arguments both for and against the council-manager form of government have changed very little in the nearly 90 years they have been made.

In the practical sense, this chapter was the most difficult for me to create. While many are fascinated with the study of metropolises, the history of Columbia is complex enough to satisfy that same form of curiosity that was sparked in me. One of the most difficult aspects of this chapter is the fact that Columbia's history has been compiled into very few resources. While I had initially anticipated being able to assess several secondary documents in regards



to Columbia's history, I found that there were few definitive sources. Many people today claim to know a good deal about Columbia's history but stories told about the past don't often match with the events once reconstructed from contemporaneous primary sources. While narratives are really the core of what constitutes our reality, there was a certain desire on my part to find out "what really happened."

This chapter then is my assessment of the history of the city and several somewhat different stories could certainly be told. For writing it, I have assessed a vast array of documents and conversational interviews. Although few, you will find several books about the City of Columbia cited below in a variety of places. In addition to these books I have read every relevant newspaper or other contemporaneous account that I have been able to find related to the moments highlighted. While there are few secondary sources, there are many in Columbia who have lived here for a long time. Although not always successful, I have attempted to have discussions with many of these people and their stories have helped to direct me toward the time periods outlined below. I do not generally use these stories directly since, as I mentioned, the stories told do not often match up too clearly with the available primary sources. While it would be quite an interesting project, gathering and assessing these narratives was not the goal and necessarily beyond the scope of this project.



This drawing of Columbia as it appeared in 1869 shows the city from the southwest, and reveals many interesting landmarks. Courtesy of the Chamber of Commerce.

Figure 3.1 – The City in 1935

### *Foundations*

The City of Columbia was incorporated November 7, 1826 and, as many cities of that era, it started as an agricultural center (Batterson 1965). Of particular importance for originally attracting people to the region was Boone's Salt Lick, which is now immortalized in a variety of stone markers indicating the old Boone's Lick wagon trail that has today become U.S. Highway 40. The people who were to settle the Columbia community primarily followed this salt lick trail from the plantations Kentucky through St Charles, Missouri and into Boone County.

These people brought slaves with them to start new plantations. It is therefore impossible to adequately describe Columbia, or any American cityspace for that matter, without understanding its racial formations. The State

of Missouri emerged as an eventual outcome of the Louisiana Purchase and, as a result of the political game to balance senate numbers, it was founded as a slave state. At the time of its formation, the County of Boone (the seat of which is my case study) began with a population comprised of approximately 16% slaves and, on the eve of the Civil War, the county's population was composed of approximately 35% slaves (Switzler 1882). Even as an agricultural area in a slave state settled by migrants from the tobacco and hemp growing regions of Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee, this is a significant enough component of the population to have garnered the label "Little Dixie" for this river plantation region. Despite a clear influence of the socioeconomics of slavery, the most definitive source regarding the early history of Boone County described it as following:

Located in the central part of the State, and settled nearly seventy years ago by a hardy and progressive race of pioneers, who then laid the foundations of its present prosperity, wealth and culture, it will be found that its history is an inexhaustible store-house of "moving incidents by flood and field," of events grave and gay, of steady advancement in agriculture, education and a Christian civilization, and in all the arts of peace. (Switzler 1882: 128-9)

For me, this highlights a pattern in which the Columbia community is perfect in theory but fatal in fact; a pattern that echos through the life of the city even today. This discourse is that of white landowners and not of those who, at the time of Switzler's writing, had been free from enslavement for less than a decade. Indeed we can see that Switzler himself drafted resolutions indicating Boone County and the State of Missouri should *protect* the institution of slavery from the "aggressive and fanatical spirit evidenced by the Abolitionists and Freesoilers of the North" (Switzler 1882: 378). Like the United States more generally, these steady advancements in agriculture, education, civilization, and peace in the Columbia community were built upon the backs of the enslaved, like

it or not. We must always be aware of these racial formations, of the history and persistence of inequality that lies under all of our successes and failures.

Despite the pervasive strength of the discourse of colorblindness in American culture, this legacy of racism remains intact (Bonilla-Silva 2001) and is most simply represented in the inequalities that continue to exist within and between spaces and social relations at any scale we choose to analyze (Smith 1996). One of the simplest ways to illustrate this persistence today in Columbia is to take a walk from the southern-most to the northern-most point of Garth Street. In this walk one can see the *planned* dividing lines between the rich and poor and the old and new.

“Walk this single street — 2½ miles long — and you’ll walk through a divided Columbia. These... residents may share a street, but they might as well live in three different cities: the new Garth subdivisions north of I-70, the old Garth neighborhood south of Broadway and the controversial Garth Corridor that sits in the middle.” (Rolland, 2007)

Interestingly, in 1935 the city plan makes mention of southern cities using zoning to keep black and white people separate and indicates that, for a progressive community like Columbia, “it is believed that mutual agreement between the races [offers] a better method of procedure” (City of Columbia, 1935). For Little Dixie, it seems that maintaining the absence of legalized segregation is a quite progressive move. On the other hand, the long term consequences of this move to “let things sort themselves out” has resulted in a white Columbia and a black Columbia based on the “natural boundary of Broadway”, de facto segregation. The persistence of this segregation can be most easily reflected in the much higher rates of unemployment in the largely minority and working class First Ward as compared to the city as a whole. When

we saw unemployment reach 22.9% in the First Ward, we saw it at only 5.3% in the city as a whole (Stevens, 2009).

What we can see over the broader perspective in The City of Columbia is an historical tendency to attempt to “do the most progressive thing.” Yet this most progressive thing has generally dodged the *work* of creating equality. With little to no attention given to the lives of black people until the era of the civil rights movement, our map of inequality changes very little over time.

Unsurprisingly, as I will discuss below, the changes that have occurred generally only further concentrated the poor and minority populations.

While it is important to be critical, within this history of inequality there have always been threads of hope and possibility and, in a utilitarian sense, lives have improved as the inequality gap has closed somewhat. Across the broad strokes of the history of Columbia, the most notable of these threads can be found in a strong emphasis on both education and civic responsibility, to which I now turn.

### *The Education of Columbia*

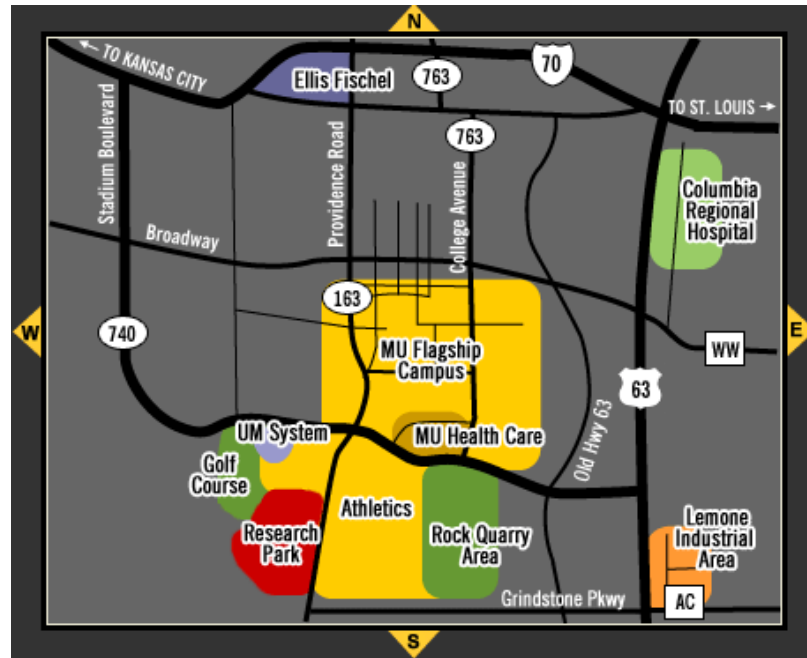
When Columbia was still a young community its members pursued the establishment of educational institutions. The Bonne Femme Academy was founded in 1829 and the first school for women, the Columbia Female Academy, was founded in 1833. Over time, this early focus on the development of educational institutions resulted in the establishment of two Colleges and a University that today all play vital roles in the community. Without this steady interest in education the University of Missouri would not exist and, without the University, the city's largest employer, Columbia would not exist as we know it today.

The story behind the University of Missouri is key to understanding this

historical interest in education in Columbia. In the 1800's, competition among towns for facilities like the state capital and the state penitentiary was common. In the most basic sense, this competition was won by the community that could put up the largest amount of money. The University then was auctioned off by the state to the highest bidder and the City of Columbia won that bid. A great deal of this money came from individual pledges of community members, some of whom were unable to read (Batterson 1965). All in all, it was a sum total of \$118,300 (approximately \$2.2 million in 2007) that Boone County residents and trustees pulled together in order to make sure the State university would be located in Columbia (Stephens 1962). Interestingly, this state institution never received funding from the state until 1867. The legislature considered the University the responsibility of the county in which it was placed. Through this early period, the University of Missouri survived through donations and tuition.

Today, the University of Missouri is the largest employer in the City and draws over to 30,000 students during the school year. If one looks to a current map of the city, the University composes quite a large area (See Figure 3.2). When walking through the city, one passes seamlessly across the line that marks the boundary between the city and the university; yet, the enrollment reports easily demonstrate that the university remains a largely white institution, mirroring the lines of inequality we see in the rest of the community and in the rest of the nation. Although the explanation as to why the poor and the minority are largely underrepresented in the university is outside the purview of this particular analytical exercise, it is important to note the persistence of this inequality.

Figure 3.2 – Basic Map of Columbia Highlighting Campus, <http://map.missouri.edu>.



An ongoing interest in civic responsibility has long kept Columbians engaged in local political processes. In 1830, for instance, 84% of qualified voters turned out to vote, a community spirit that would later help to make Columbia the county seat (Switzler 1882). While this spirit of civic responsibility can be illustrated in many ways, I will offer another brief story about the history of the University of Missouri to do so. In 1892, Jesse Hall, the primary University building at the time, burned to the ground because the only source of water was close but minimal and quickly exhausted with little effect (The Columbia/Boone County Sesquicentennial Commission, 1971). The most interesting consequence of this fire was the establishment of Municipal Water and Light, a utility department that continues to exist today. In order to keep the University in Columbia, the city was required to build a unified water system to ensure such a fire could be adequately dealt with in the future.

The key point in this instance is that the connection between community,

government, and the University is strong throughout the history of Columbia. In order to maintain its position as an education focused city, the community turned to local government to solve the problem. As the process toward a unified and regulated water system developed, members of the community once again pulled together their own resources to help the community at large and ensure that the University remained in its place. Without this initiative and cooperation, it is hard to imagine what the city would look like today without The University of Missouri.

There is obviously a huge span of time and great historical changes between the 1800's and the present that have not been mentioned here but this time period set the stage for the creation of this cityspace. Columbia, like all other communities, is far different from what it once was. In fact, these loose ideals of education and civic responsibility may have less to do with the real physical and social shape of the city than the previously mentioned inequalities; yet, I note these threads of education and civic responsibility because I believe they have always and will likely continue to mark the best of what *any* community can conceive. The people who founded this city included some of Sen's (2009) ideas by helping to form a spirit of a community in pursuit of reasoned thought through calling on its members to cooperate and collaborate in the everyday processes of the creation of cityspace. While there have been strong frictions between the rhetoric of equality and the unequal realities of everyday life, the logic of this overall long term process is one that has *reduced* inequality over time.

### *Planned Space, Responsible Space*

While it wasn't until the 1930's that city plans became official written documents to be approved by the mayor and council, the history discussed so far should indicate that the "founding fathers" of Columbia, Missouri had plans for



establishing strong institutions of education and democracy. The plans I discuss below both provide a glimpse at what community members believed the city could become and illuminate overall themes that have run through the city's history. These plans demonstrate how planners and citizens thought the cityspace of Columbia was and could be shaped. By following this history of what planners and citizens see as contemporary concerns and issues, how they paint the past, and what they imagine for the future, the shape of this cityspace begins to emerge. Additionally, and importantly for my ends here, as we look at this history of planning, we can see the slow shift from planning as a creation of a single dictating professional to planning as a collaborative process between city staff and citizens.

What I offer here is a brief sketch of the history of official city planning. I have grouped the available planning documents by theme and time period. The first set spans the largest time period, 1935 through the 1960's, and provides everything from population projections to street and theme guidelines to utilize as the city expanded. The emphasis in these early plans lies in the interest in planning itself. By making perfectly defined plans, it was believed, the future would be perfect. The second set of plans come from the 1980's and 1990's and are set apart for marking an odd phase in Columbia's planning history where sections of the city were considered as if they operated independently. This departure in planning history can be considered the most businesslike phase in which planners dictated what industries and uses would go in what places. Importantly however, this planning period also marks the first time that the documents make specific references to citizen participation in the planning process. Finally, the third set of documents comes from 2000 to present. Here we see the great expansion of inclusive planning processes, a return to earlier

and more unified planning themes, and a huge proliferation of planning documents more generally. As the city has grown more complex over time, more and more detailed plans have been made for every imaginable aspect of the operation of the city and citizen input has become a central aspect of deciding the future.

### Part 1: Laying the Foundations for the Future

The planning periods around 1935 and the 1960's cover a large span of time but have strong similarities and were authored by the same planning firm. Importantly, there is a clear influence of modernism that comes through in both the focus on establishing procedures for decision making and the assertion that data based plans are the answer to solving and anticipating all problems. Reflecting the rational technocratic perspective of the planners, we see city planning as an interest in assuring "an ultimate, orderly, related civic development" (The City of Columbia, Planning and Zoning, 1935, 7). The planners approach to creating a just society is very much like the transcendental approach taken by Habermas (1991); that is, through the creation of the appropriate institutions, policies, and processes, we can reach a just society. Through orderly and related development then, the City of Columbia could become a beacon of light just as any other well-planned and orderly city could become.

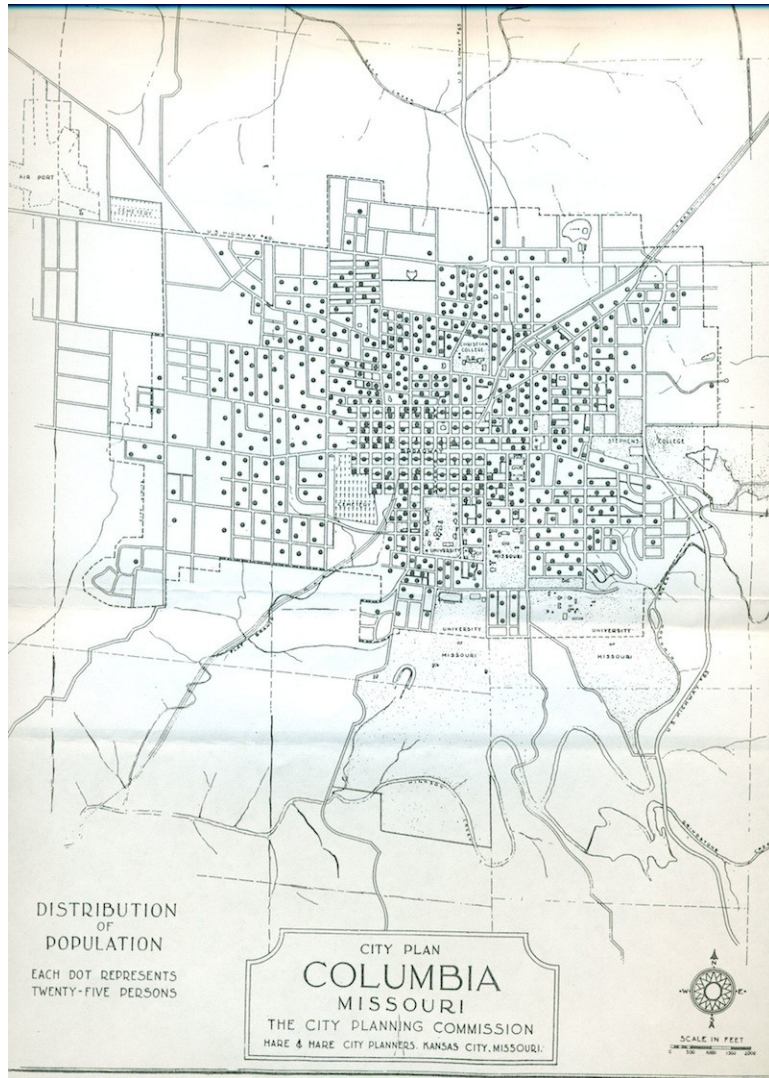
In developing their plans, the planners work to take what they believe to be a holistic approach by assessing local social and physical conditions of the past and the present while speculating about the future. In this respect, the 1935 plan is divided into two parts, with the Part I outlining "General Conditions" in pages nine through thirteen and Part II describing "Recommendations" in pages fourteen through forty. Although the planners offer a brief treatment, Part I

includes in its list of contents “History,” “Site and Topography,” “Climate,” “Growth of Population,” “Racial Composition,” “Distribution and Trend of Population,” and “Student Population.” A key chart and a key map from the general conditions section of the 1935 plan have been included below as figures 3.2 and 3.4. In the list on section contents and through these charts we can see the historical aspects of the City of Columbia the planners consider important.

In Part II, “Recommendations,” the planners describe what they believe to be the best institutions to establish to create the best future for the city. They spend pages fourteen to twenty five discussing “Major Streets,” “Transit,” and “Transportation;” pages twenty five to thirty seven on “Public Property;” and pages thirty seven to forty on “Private Property.” In this particular time period we must note that federal, state, and local governments were only beginning down the path to establishing a legal structure that allowed for “city plans.” Thus, in the recommendations made by the planners in 1935, it was important for them to discuss the relationship between city government and private property.

“Every owner of land has an obligation to use his property in such a way that it will not be detrimental to the city of his neighbors, and he in turn expects the same protection. Control of purely aesthetic matters, such as architectural design, can only be exercised through private restrictions, but matters which affect the health, safety, convenience *and welfare* of the community and its citizens, very properly come under legal control.” (The City of Columbia, Planning and Zoning, 1935: 37; *emphasis mine*)

Figure 3.3. Distribution of Population.



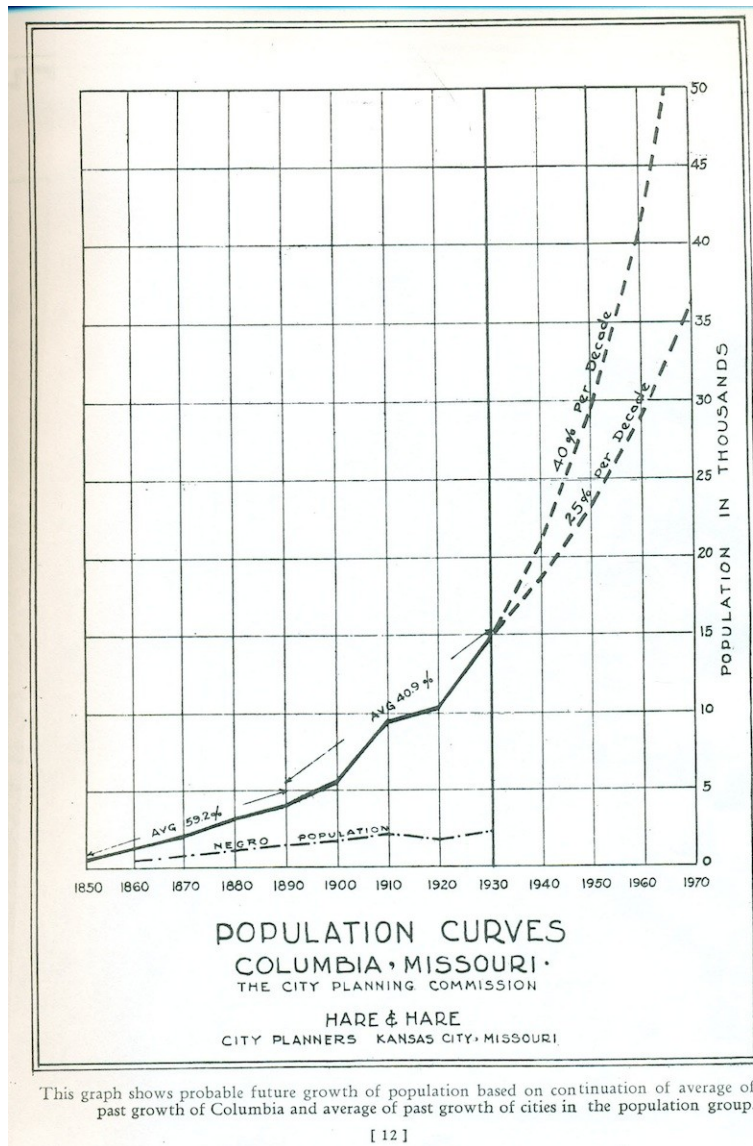
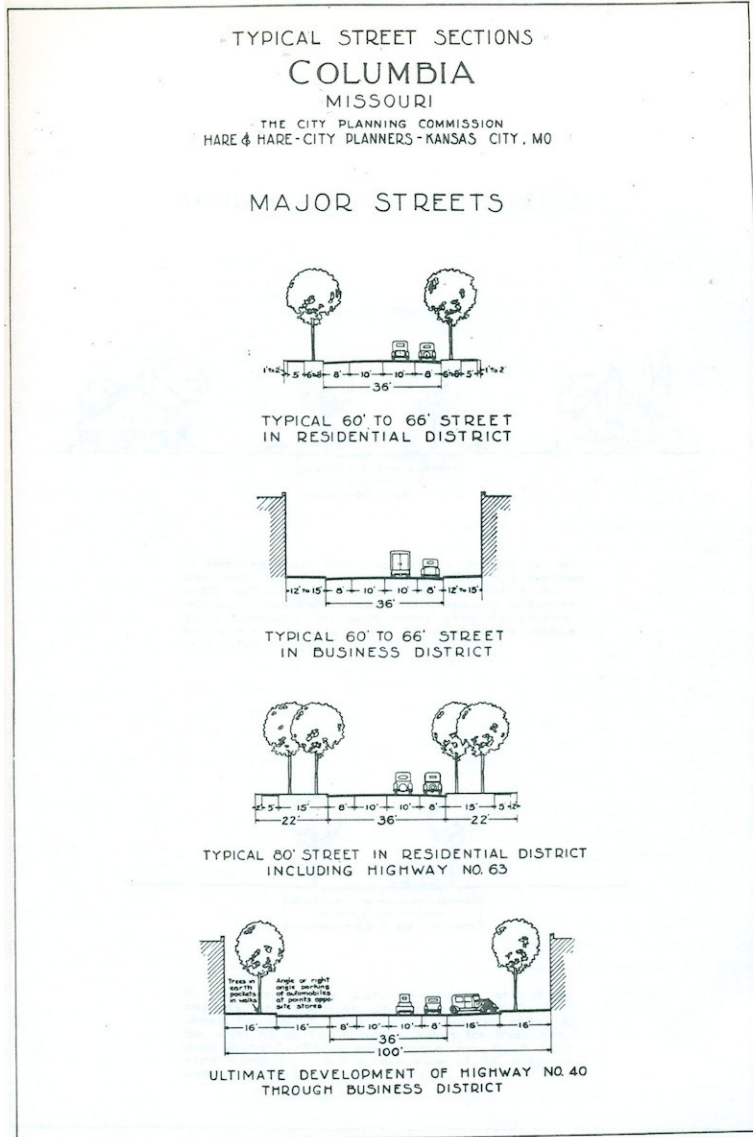


Figure 3.4 – Population Estimates, Noting “Negro Population.”

The justification of plans and planning was a key aspect of the 1935 plan but does not mark the only recommendation made. As the contents indicate, the planners spend a great deal of time discussing the future plans for road design, I have included a sample image (figure 3.5) showing how the planners commonly presented street dimensions. The intent of the planners in their recommendations was to set up a road network into which the city could grow. At the time, the planners believed that we ought to focus on *wider* streets at more regular intervals. Although the emphasis on wider streets has reversed and started moving in the direction of more pedestrian oriented streetscapes today, the importance of road networks has not diminished since 1935.

Although the general topics, recommendations, and even many of the illustrations are nearly identical, the plans of 1966 are more thorough with respect to both conditions and recommendations, breaking them into two planning documents titled "Columbia Today" (the conditions) and "Columbia Tomorrow" (the recommendations). Columbia Today highlights "General Conditions," "The Regional Setting," "The Economy and Population," "Existing Land Use Patterns," "Public and Community Facilities," "Traffic and Transportation," and "The Urban Environment." This document marks a surprisingly wide ranging assessment of the historical development and the social and physical conditions of the city.



This drawing shows cross sections for development of typical major streets including ultimate development of Highway No. 40 through business sections.

[ 16 ]

Figure 3.5 – Commonly Used Style to Demonstrate Street Dimensions

In Columbia Tomorrow, the planners discuss the “Basis for the Plan,” “Major Thoroughfares and Streets,” “Land Use,” “Public and Community Facilities,” and “Implementation.” In the overall scheme of things, this plan only expands on the earlier 1935 plan, often reiterating an old point or simply directing decision makers back to 1935 with a little irritation in the tone, noting that these same recommendations have already been made and should have already been completed! Importantly for the purposes at hand, the planners claim that “[a] land development plan, first and foremost, is a policy document which expresses the views of the City's leaders about the way a community should grow” (The City of Columbia, Planning Commission, 1967, 3). This tendency is key to understanding these early attempts at the creation of cityspace, plans were clearly *dictated* by professionals. While these early city plans indicated an importance to citizen “buy-in”, buy-in is not engagement and more recent planning processes actually work to gather citizen input; marking one of the greatest historical differences across the broad scope of planning in Columbia.

Though both the 1935 and 1960's plans describe themselves as having an *interest* in social conditions, they largely detail the history and future of the *physical* city. A common trend in city plans of this era, the focus on physical planning and, more specifically, road planning, indicates how planners rightly believed a road network and effective connections within a city and to neighboring cities could make a great city. Over the broad strokes of time, the importance of these transportation corridors cannot really be emphasized enough in Columbia. What was once merely a trail to Boone's Salt Lick became U.S. Highway 40 and later Interstate 70. This road system has not only always provided Columbia with close ties to its metropolitan neighbors, Kansas City and St. Louis, but it has also served to connect Columbia to the rest of the nation and



now to the rest of the world. In this instance, the combination of transportation and education may be one of the more powerful influences over the history of this cityspace. The early focus on education helped to develop a university that today draws students from around the globe and the perhaps lucky ease of access to the most travelled interstate highway in the nation had the cumulative effect of making Columbia a fairly diverse space in thought and shape.

While there are clearly many similarities across these two planning periods, one of the most important differences lies in the fact that the 1935 plan explicitly discusses "racial composition" while the 1965 plan dances around social problems with only vague and somewhat confusing references to "class structure." Although it is purely speculation on my part, I believe that this shift in focus and language emerged at least in part as a consequence of the *still* controversial "Douglass School Urban Renewal Project" and the Land Clearance Redevelopment Authority (LCRA) that was the decision-making authority for this process to which I now briefly turn.

This historical ordeal began when the Columbia Chamber of Commerce proposed a plan for the redevelopment of the downtown area in 1957. In particular, the Chamber cited: overcrowding of structures on the land; mixed use of structures; "adverse factors"; narrow, crooked, inconvenient, congested, unsafe streets; deficiencies in streets; open sewers; and over occupancy of structures as the primary reasons for the redevelopment of the downtown area through the creation of the LCRA (The Columbia Daily Tribune, Sep 4 1958). The study that made the case for redevelopment indicated that out of a total of 445 structures, 433 were substandard, and out of a total of 520 families, 500 of were nonwhite. Finally, they stated "obviously, the vast majority of all residential structures are dilapidated or in need of major repairs, constituting almost all of

the buildings in the interior of the project and a substantial proportion of the peripheral properties” (LCRA, July 1957: R-203, 3). For a city that looked to continue as a relevant place into the future, the Chamber of Commerce declared that the downtown area had to be redeveloped.

In analyzing the documents surrounding the LCRA process and the pictures that accompany them, it is clear that the study area was truly in incredibly horrible shape (see figures 3.6, 3.7). The living conditions in the downtown Columbia area circa 1960 were largely like those we would see in an average “third world” city today (McMichael, 2003). In fact, I find it difficult to offer an overall prognosis of this process. While many are quick to attack urban renewal processes, it is hard to defend the living conditions around Water Street in the downtown Columbia of the late 1950's. Water Street very literally followed a tributary to Flat Branch Creek and was packed with people, business, livestock, and open sewers running right into creek which was, by all accounts, already packed with trash. In short, these conditions were horrible and appropriately dealing with the creek that ran right through the middle of town required a major project.

It is important to note that, unlike many of the gentrification projects of which social scientists have written, this development process *did* include some of those affected by the land clearance project. Most notably, the reconstruction of the neighborhood churches was of great importance and drew the various congregations into the redevelopment process. One description in the Final Report of the LCRA noted that:

[after] many long months of patient negotiation, courageous struggle, and dedication to the betterment of the whole community, the major problems were solved with the building of their new Church home at 1<sup>st</sup> and Ash. The dedication of the new Chapel

was a proud day for the congregation and also for the officials of the Land Clearance Redevelopment Authority. It demonstrated again that with sincere effort to work through the many difficult problems of displacement and relocation a solution could be achieved to the satisfaction of everyone concerned. (LCRA, 1966)

The final sentence here is incredibly surprising for any redevelopment project that involves the mass relocation of citizens. In many (if not most) of the cases of such redevelopment the residents are simply forced to move (Smith, Neil, 1996, 2002). In this instance however, we can see that residents were included in the process to some degree. Further, the Final Report of the LCRA goes on to note that \$58,373.83 in federal grant money was paid to families and businesses for moving expenses and over 2.5 million was invested in commercial buildings. While the figures are lopsided and it is commonly stated that families were underpaid, the key here is that money *was* paid to families, businesses *were* reconstructed in more suitable structures for the area, a great deal of public housing *was* constructed, and importantly, this housing continues to be quite close to the central city.

Yet, the story of those affected by the redevelopment project goes largely untold and will likely remain largely untellable as memories fade and observers pass away. The stories of those who were forcibly moved are only reflected today in memories that hint at the money paid out for property to be redeveloped being too little or in the fact that much of the redeveloped area is now occupied by the local post office and newspaper facilities. While I have heard several people retell the stories of this era through memory, these stories are inconclusive or used as background narratives to make a point about an historical tendency. While none of the sources can be treated as definitive, it is the narratives themselves that shape our cityspace today. Through utilizing the

aspects of this redevelopment project that are salient for the story at hand, community members can paint a picture of cityspace as they see it.

Knowing that inequality was strong during the downtown redevelopment process and knowing that inequalities continue today (although notably less stark), it is apparent that the redevelopment project had little focus on the reduction or elimination of inequality. Knowing the history of inequality in the United States, the most likely conclusion here is that the relocated emerged from the redevelopment project in a physically safer environment with fewer material resources. It is notable today that there is no major black community business hub in the central city as there was prior to the land clearance project. In the place of a centralized district of black owned businesses we can today find a post office and the local newspaper office and printing facility.

While the redevelopment project and the 1935 and 1968 plans that bookend this project were important and entirely necessary for the future of the city, it is unclear that the theme of "civic responsibility" that flows through the history of the City of Columbia included any consideration for the future that faced the black community after redevelopment and relocation. This particular development project has become an historical spur in race relations among the Columbia community and today the story of the LCRA is often utilized as a narrative that helps to perpetuate distrust of local governance.

Dilapidated, insanitary conditions existing in Douglass Area prior to redevelopment.



Downtown.



Outside pit toilets.



Inadequate heating.



Poor facilities.



Open sewers.



Unsafe Housing.

Figure 3.6 – Downtown Columbia Living Conditions

## FLOODING FLAT BRANCH AND TRIBUTARIES BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL



This open sewer west of Providence Road caused many health, sanitation and flooding problems.



Open ditch west of Fifth Street.

Figure 3.7 – Open Sewer and Ditch Downtown

### Part 2: Dividing the City

The early planning documents outlined so far, to a certain extent, considered the social conditions of the city and maintained, though somewhat

confused and buried, a certain theme of social justice. On the other hand, the plan adopted in 1983 makes almost no reference to social inequalities and focuses primarily on development. Furthermore, this is the first plan to use a good deal of language regarding civic participation and marks the *only* time that an overall city plan treats the city as a set of entirely independent planning areas (see figure 3.8). Although it is common to focus on specific areas of the city in planning discussions, this is the only time when the planning areas of interest were not considered to be parts of a greater whole.

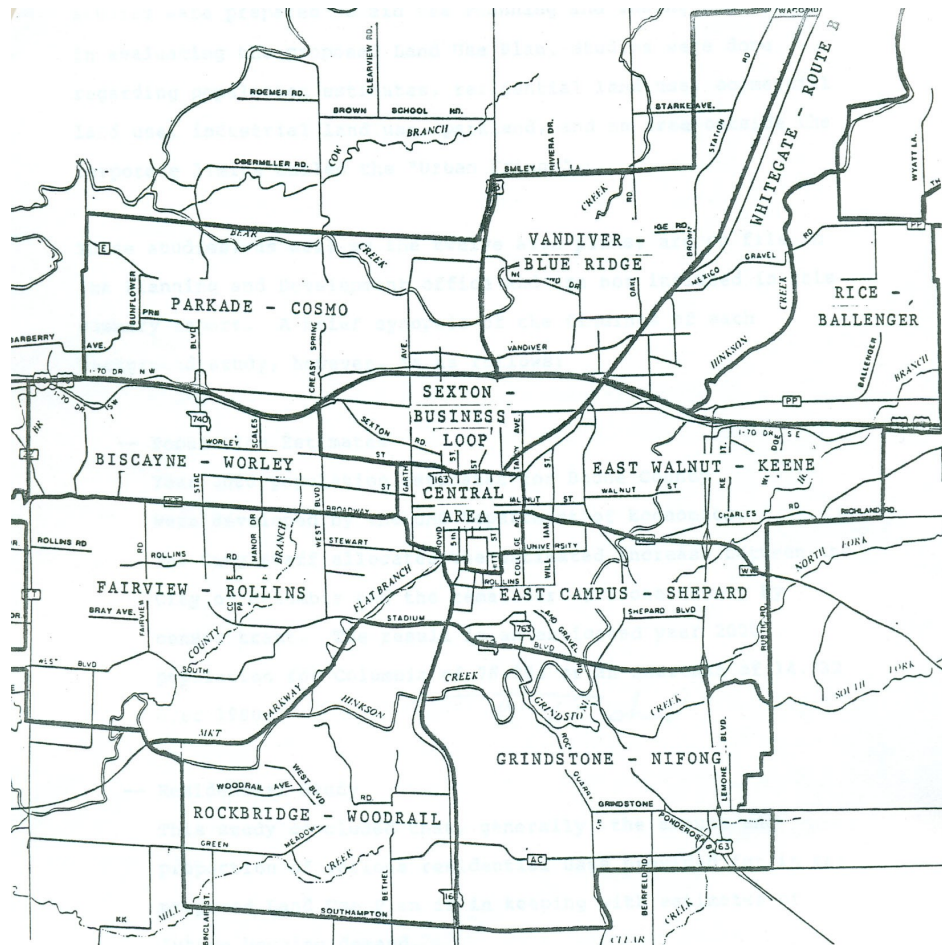


Figure 1

LAND USE STUDY AREAS

Figure 3.8 – Planned Divisions

Here we see a trend away from considering the city to be full of a mix of uses and toward the isolation of uses. This isolation approach, intentionally or not, had the consequence of perpetuating the islands of poverty that exist within Columbia's First Ward. In fact, the 1983 plan treats these areas, which they call "neighborhoods," by zoning specific sets of uses into each area, these included: low to high density residential areas, "community facilities or institutional," office, planned office, commercial, planned commercial, industrial, planned industrial, research and development park, "public parks, private recreation," and open space (The City of Columbia, Planning and Zoning Commission, October 1982). This marks the first clear application in Columbia of what has become fairly standard zoning practice for many communities. The thing that really sets this plan apart from the rest of this city's planning history is dividing the city into these twelve independent areas. As figures 3.9, 3.10, and 3.11 demonstrate the poor were not only historically concentrated in areas that were close to a wealth of dangers like railroads and other bottomlands (Jindrich, 2002), but the plans of the 1980's called for the expansion of industrial zones and the broadening of high traffic roads near poor neighborhoods (The City of Columbia, Planning and Zoning Commission. October 1981). In all respects, this plan is the perfect illustration of a philosophy focused solely on market expansion.

As mentioned, this plan *does* make reference to gathering public comment. In fact, the primary justifications for dividing the city into twelve areas described first, as the difficulties associated with studying a "large geographic area", and, second, as a method of better gathering public input (The City of Columbia, Planning and Zoning Commission, October 1982). This particular paragraph justifying the use of independent areas is the *only* time citizen input is mentioned, making it impossible to know and understand the quantity or



content of this input.

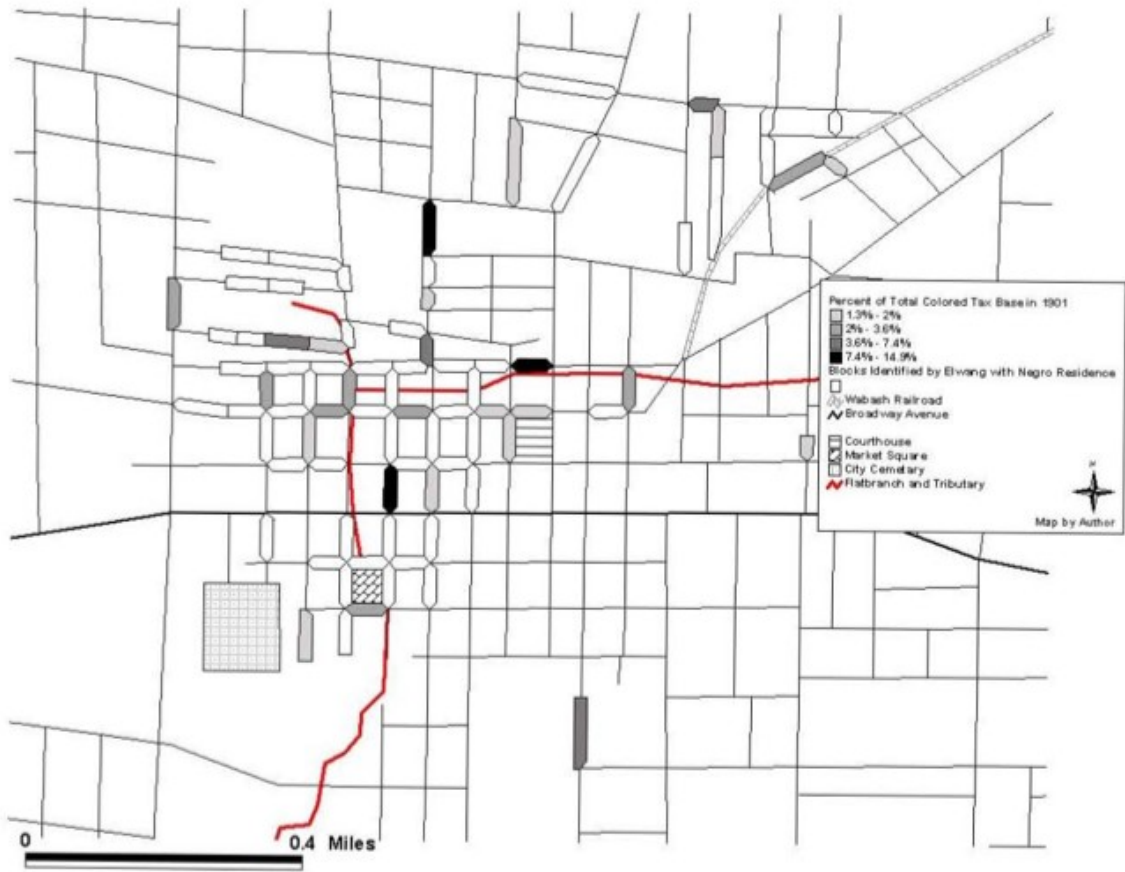


Figure 3.9 – Historic Concentration of Black Population Close to Water and Danger

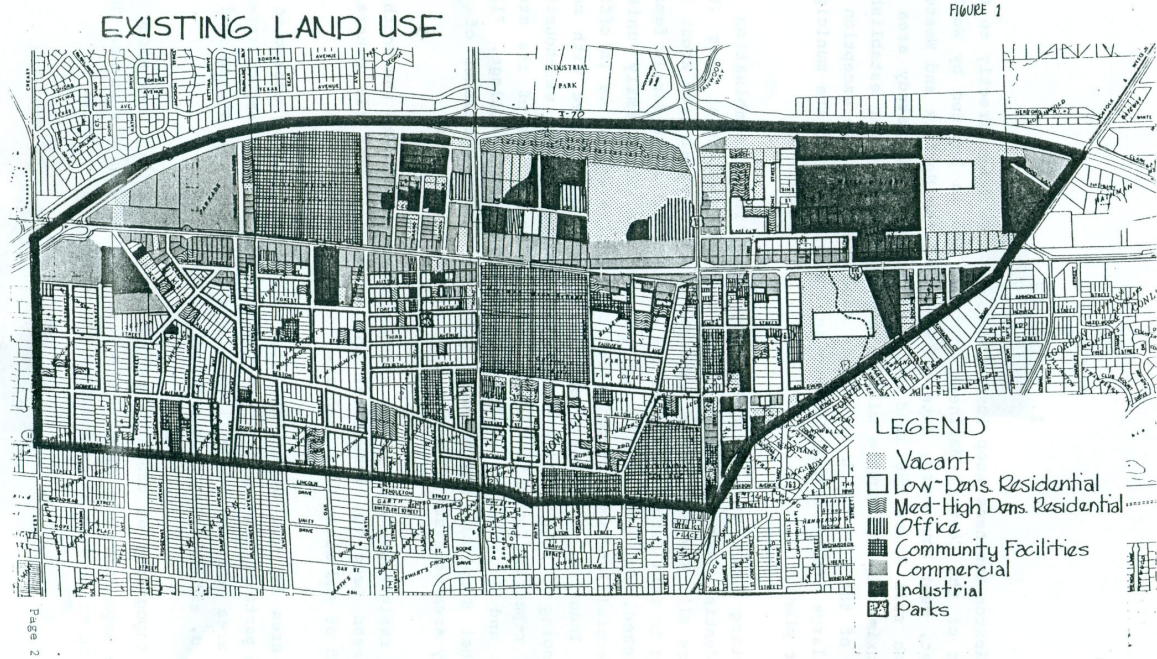


Figure 3.10 – 1980's Plan Indicating Already Existing Uses and Marking Out Poor Neighborhood

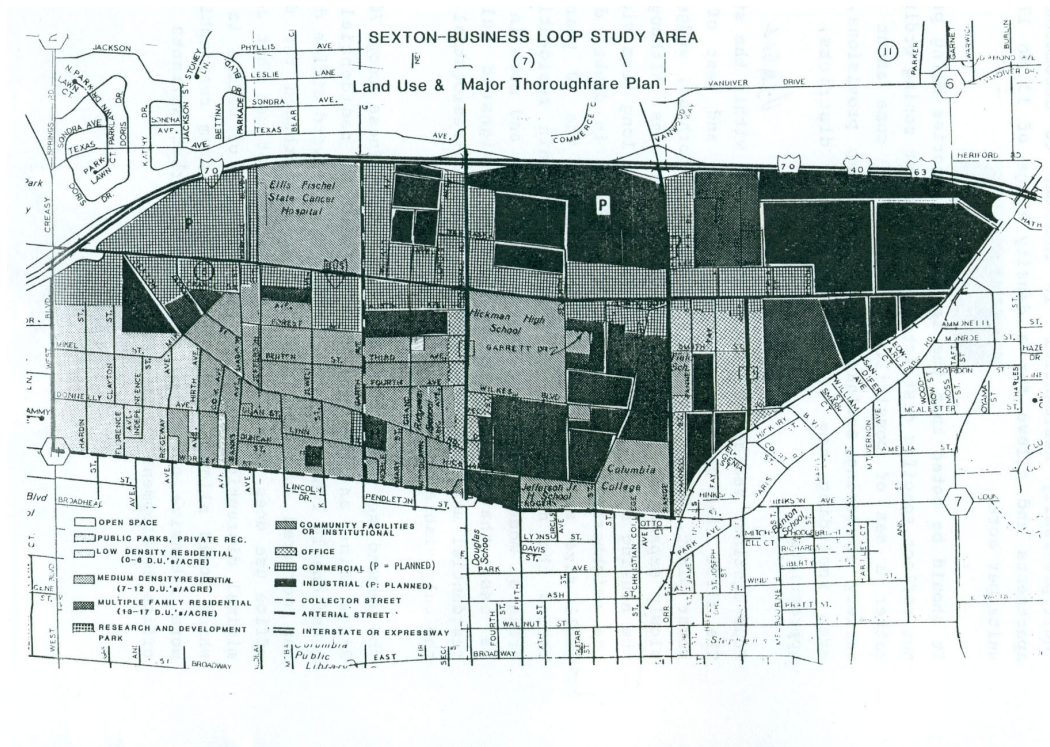


Figure 3.11 – Future Land Use Plan Calling for Industry and Road Expansion

Moving deeper into the plan, each independent planning area gets its own section titled: “Overview,” “Trends and Projections,” “Land Use Problems,” “Land Use Plan,” and “Conclusion” (The City of Columbia, Planning and Zoning Commission, 1981). These sections, throughout the entire set of plans, are written in a very detached, mechanical, and formal style that includes large and detailed zoning maps that allude to quite a significant body of greater details on zoning categories that could be found in city code at the time these documents were originally written. For me, this marks a significant outlier in the general history of local planning. Where it has been common to at least allude to dealing with both social problems and making the city a better place for all, this planning period takes no such step.

It is difficult to pin down the *impact* of this particular planning period. However, we can see, for instance, that large swaths of land developed during this planning period lack sidewalks (see figure 3.12). In the broader historical context and despite adding such great detail to zoning categories, this time period saw a strong rise in what we could call a free market ideology. In the sense of development in Columbia, this planning period gave local developers greater flexibility in their projects. A centralization of organization was sacrificed in order to increase the overall rate of development. As a consequence, the developments created were of a lower quality than what is demanded by the consumer today. As noted above, in the map of sidewalks provided by the City of Columbia (see figure 3.12), a large strip of developments surrounding the city center that do not have sidewalks is quite evident. Once the appropriate structural regulatory construct was added to the zoning regulations, creating the requirement that sidewalks be constructed in new developments, this absence no



longer occurred. The point here is not to have a discussion about regulation generally, but to highlight the general contours of planning in the 1980's and thereby continue developing the picture of this cityspace in the readers imagination. While there may have been some sort of public engagement surrounding these planning processes, the actual plans do not include the historically driving theme of civic responsibility and it seems fairly clear that it does not exist in the imagination if it is not written in the plan. Importantly here, while the plan itself may seem anomalous, it clearly had an impact on the shape of local cityspace nonetheless.

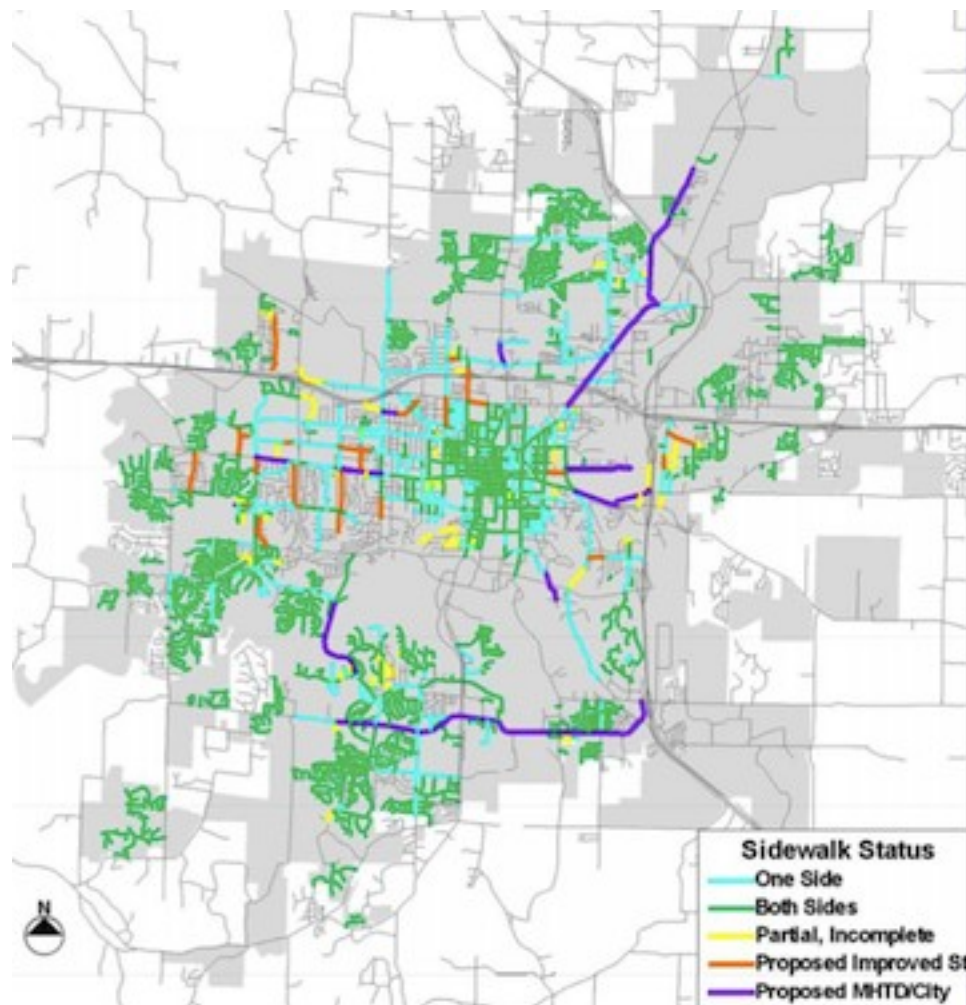


Figure 3.12 – Sidewalks Built When Required

### Part 3: Rescripting the Past

In the most recent planning period (from 2000 to the present) we can see both the continuation of negative trends and the revival of several positive trends from all of the past planning periods. The most important negative trend is the continued failure to explicitly discuss and deal with the social inequalities that run through the Columbia community. Like most of the rest of The United States, it would appear the Columbia community believes that avoiding discussions of racial inequity and focusing solely on “community development” will make inequality disappear. It is important to note that *discussions* of the inclusion of impoverished people in planning processes have been happening, yet, the realization of this inclusion would appear quite difficult indeed. With a history of exclusion or even failed inclusion, distrust of government is strong amongst the poor of Columbia. Importantly however, a theme of justice does reappear to a certain extent in this more recent planning period and is best highlighted in a concern with working to provide employment for all, necessary facilities and services, and stable and safe neighborhoods.

The brief trend of isolating land uses into distinct areas ended with a return to mixing uses and, at the same time, it seems that there was a return to a general interest in the relationship between the physical and social conditions of the city. That is to say, the focus on *only* development did not continue into the most recent planning period. To offer a few highlights, we can see the change in the “Columbia 2000” plan with an emphasis on: “Quality of Life;” “Slow, steady, diverse growth;” and “Shared Spaces and Places” (The Columbia 2000 II Task Force, March 1993). We can see the continuation of this tendency come through in the “Columbia Metro 2020” with an emphasis on “The Cost of Sprawl” or the creation of “Employment Center's” and adequate “Community Facilities” (The

City of Columbia, Planning and Zoning Commission, 1998). What both of these plans illustrate is a return to the old theme of civic responsibility and the attempt to begin closing off of the more free market ideologies that operated in the 1980's.

It is obvious that there are no guarantees for a better future to come of planning today although I am hopeful and do believe that a plan is better than *no* plan as you can at least have something of which to be critical. As I continue to be involved in and keep track of the plans being laid for the future of the city, I feel comfortable saying that there are a great many people who are strongly concerned with creating equality. This alone may provide us with more and better chances to create the sorts of equal and open cityspaces that many have long pursued. By continuing to work for the inclusion of diverse perspective in a reasoned dialogue, we can continue to create more just cityspaces.

Importantly, the point here is not to offer an elaborate history of planning in Columbia. Although they make for an interesting historical read, I do not offer details of zoning regulations and restrictions. Instead, I have highlighted the recurring frictions in planning for the future of the City of Columbia. For me, the most important friction lies in this consistent and longstanding historical gap between progressive rhetoric and oppressive reality. Where on the one hand the language of inclusiveness and the need for "citizen buy-in" increases in quantity and clarity over time, it is not clear that *actual* rates of inclusion or participation have changed. At the broadest of regulatory levels, there are some obviously increased levels of inclusion in, for instance, suffrage for women and black people. Yet, the granting of political rights does not equal participation. With the compounding effect of fear and distrust of government among the black and poor communities and a long history of rights and rewards deferred or never given, it

is not surprising to me that I see few, if any, black or poor people participating in the planning processes in which I have been involved.

On a more locally focused level, in the history of planning it seems common for plans to lay out fantastic or impossible ideas as realistically achievable futures (Clarke, 1999). Granted, many of these documents are not policy and are intended to *portray* an ideal future toward which the community *should* be pointed. At the same time, unrealistic plans lead to disappointment and disappointment leads to disengagement. In this respect then, the gap between the ideal neighborhoods portrayed in the earliest and latest planning periods and the neighborhoods in which people actually live in is generally quite immense. Where plans call for carefully organized and centralized neighborhoods, Columbia has a great many disorganized and disconnected neighborhoods scattered across the region. Although this gap between ideal plans and actual regulation seems to be closing, today there seems to be little belief in or trust of the abilities of those who govern to finish closing this gap.

#### *Responsible Governance and the Council-Manager Form of Government*

The shift from a council-mayor to a council-manager form of governance is an important story that has created and maintained a certain degree of friction in The City of Columbia throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the case of many U.S. cities, we can see the shift over time away from a council-mayor and toward a council-manager form of government as a shift away from the cronyism that had ruled politics prior to the change; furthermore, it is important to note that the cities rated as the best cities in the nation are largely operated by council-manager forms of governance (ICMA, May 2007). It is unsurprising then that we see this shift occurring in cities throughout the nation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century as cities look more at the places around them that are

considered competitors.

In 1925, the first time the city put the council-manager form of government to vote, it failed because it was seen as both unnecessary and undemocratic. That is, it was believed that the council could adequately handle the job assigned to them and the structure of the city manager position itself was seen as antidemocratic (Crighton 1987). There is rather little else to learn from the available sources at the time. It would seem that the issue itself was in, out, and forgotten rather quickly.

The return of the council-manager form of government on the Columbia ballot would wait for another 20 years and was in this latter instance centralized around the alleged mismanagement of \$300,000 in Water and Light resources. While there were two clearly opposed pro and con sides to this issue, the factual core of the events lacks public documentation and remains unclear. On the one side, members of the community appeared to be shocked by the seeming disappearance of a quite significant sum of money. Most interestingly, the "Columbia Charter Committee" produced an entertaining and accessible pamphlet in support of the shift to a council-manager form of government for reasons of greater efficiency. The group's primary focus was on the need for clear and efficient centralized management to avoid any future waste of resources.

On the other side, the group of money squandering cronies was believed to be the elected city council and those on the city payroll. In their own defense, the City Attorney wrote a letter to the editor explaining that a new influx of residents going to The University of Missouri on money from the Post War GI Bill had forced an unexpected extension of city utility services that resulted in the surprise expenditure of many city resources (Tull, March 19, 1949). Although it



seems fairly reasonable on the surface, it is hard to see the *failure to plan* as an acceptable defense for the maintenance of the current form of government which you support. Thus it seems that the shift away from the council-mayor to the council-manager form of government was likely a consequence of the failure to adequately manage the future of the city.

In the end, a charter focused on a council-manager form of government was accepted by the Columbia community and put into law. This same charter form of government continues today although, oddly enough and despite clear evidence to support the claim, there seems to be a perception today that the city manager caters solely to business interests. In the overall scheme of things, it seems likely that the shape of this distrust emerged from the deregulation themed planning period of the 1980's. As is reflected in maps of the city that I have included above, the most disorganized and generally disliked developments came about during this planning period that today seems to be characterized by the community as a time of deregulation. In a community like Columbia that prides itself on appearing to be particularly progressive, deregulation in support of business interests created a narrative in which progressives were betrayed, whether it is actually true or not. In this respect then, we can see that once betrayed, the community is slow to return trust and may pay little attention to reality, particularly in today's increasingly polarized political environment (Gellman 2008). With the community turned against itself it is hard to create any sort of reasonable dialogue.

*Throughout the history of this debate*, the friction that appears over the city charter emerges, on the one hand, in support of a city manager as the most effective and efficient form of governance and, on the other, in an attack against a city manager as antidemocratic. It would seem, as previously indicated, that

the most logically defensible position in this respect is in support of a city manager, but logic alone does not change narratives. Instead, this friction shapes the contemporary political landscape of the community such that city staff appears to be under attack from members of the community as they believe nobody is there to defend their interests. Although neither position may be entirely accurate they nonetheless, and confusingly enough, continue to shape the way debates are organized in Columbia.

### *Why it Matters*

The purpose of this chapter has been to offer an outline of the history of Columbia, to get a feel for this cityspace through a look at the past, and to understand the frictions that have shaped the physical and political environment of the city. In coming to understand the history of a space through the lens of the perceived, we can begin to see the stage upon which current events occur.

Some of these elements that make up the shape of Columbia are quite apparent. For instance, The University of Missouri has played and continues to play a pivotal role in the shape of the city. We have been and continue to be a highly educated community. We can also see the persistence of inequality, which is not unique to Columbia, Missouri, The United States, or the rest of the World. As can and should be expected in highly educated communities, a variety of people have long spoken about the elimination of inequality but the reality of the situation is somewhat different. While we do see local academic discussions regarding race, the actual policy discussions remain thin; only to be marked by a 1935 city plan and a 1996 report on race relations. Furthermore, Missouri has quite the sordid history of racism and Columbia has by no means escaped this history. The last lynching occurred in a very public place through which people still commute on their way to work everyday.

Today, as I write this, we are in the middle of a continuing economic crisis that has already begun to fade for the wealthy and has continued to worsen for the poor. At 5.3%, unemployment levels are relatively low for the City of Columbia as compared to the nation. On the other hand, if we look at only the working class first ward we can see that, at 22.9%, unemployment is significantly higher than in the rest of the nation (Stevens, 2009). While this will likely come as no surprise to a student of inequalities, it is important to point out that these vast gulfs of wealth exist in the most highly educated and supposedly progressive communities of the nation.

Thus, in the history of Columbia and therefore in the backdrop of the present we can see that there has long been a key friction between the rhetoric of academic liberals and the unequal realities of everyday life. Through this friction however, I believe we can find a way forward. Instead of proposing lofty or impossible fantasy plans that breed distrust, we could create carefully analyzed plans that offer real and specific possibilities for a better cityspace. While it is certainly good to dream, a city *plan* may not be the best place for such dreams. Instead of prescribing solutions and foisting them upon the underprivileged, we can engage communities in deliberative dialogues to help educate about context and possibility while collaboratively developing truly progressive solutions to the problems faced. Where we have long tried to create economic development in the “third world” through macroeconomic policy change, microlending directly to the folks in need has turned out a far more effective and palatable approach.

Perhaps the most difficult barrier that has been erected due to these frictions over the span of history in Columbia (and in the nation for that matter), is that of distrust. While trust can be destroyed in an instant, it is quite difficult to

gain and maintain, particularly when a community has been long betrayed by promises of equality. We need not allow this friction to send us cowering in fear. Instead, we need to again take note of what is possible and impossible, we need to stop making promises we can't fulfill, and we need to be unafraid of engaging with the very real conflicts between rich and poor in our communities around the world. In doing this, we can begin draw everyone into a new dialogue that can help us work through our past and into the future.

It is important to note that these frictions in the City of Columbia are reflected at all scales. Whether we look at local, county, state, national, or global governance we can see these same frictions between rich and poor, between promises given and kept. In this sense then, Columbia serves more generally as a point of access into the failures of our past and the possibilities of our future. Like Columbia, our governing bodies at other scales have long made promises they could not keep and held up dreams that could not be achieved. Over time, I would argue that this has helped to create and maintain a pervasive sense of distrust that will now be very difficult to overcome regardless of how rational we think we are capable of being. In this friction however, I do not see impossible barriers and intractable conflict, instead, I see the possibility of the emergence of a truly reasonable and rational dialogue.

Through this chapter I have given the read an illustration of how life in Columbia, Missouri has developed over time. Through the lens of the perceived the stage that is the Columbia of the present becomes clearer. At the same time, it is important to note that the residents, at every stage of this community's development, had a perception of the past, a lived experience of the present, and a conceived dream for the future. It is through this constant interplay of past, present, and future that the shape of the city is constantly (re)created. As I move

forward in the next chapter I help the reader understand some of these dreams for the future that are shaping the city today.

## Chapter 4: Columbia Imagined

The story told in this chapter offers contours, episodes, and highlights of “Imagine Columbia's Future”, a citizen-driven process designed to develop a vision for the future of the city. Through this description I offer moments which, in Anna Tsing's (2004) terms, reveal the friction between the rigidity of a structured process and the resistance of participants. Through these frictions a document (the vision for the future compiled) emerged and was portrayed as a cohesive statement from the community. In some senses, this document has every right to claim this representation as many members of the community were involved. On the other hand, some voices were excluded due to, for instance, simple scheduling conflicts and others were silenced because the process was organized around progress toward a clear goal (a vision document) instead of creating a community of ongoing dialogue. This process began in May of 2006 and continues to play a role in local governance and politics today. At every step there was resistance to both the scripted organization of the process and the pressure to maintain this organizational style.

In building this narrative, I draw from a variety of public sources. The first portions of the visioning process occurred prior to my involvement so the events have been reconstructed through newspaper articles and conversations with those who played a role in these early phases. My methods in this respect were similar to those utilized for the historical chapter, that is, an exploration and assessment of documents contextualized by discussions with key actors.

Outside of these early portions, the descriptions of the contradictory moments of this visioning process are rooted in conversations, observations, ethnographic field notes, and the documents utilized for the process. To write

this part of the story, I took on the role of participant-observer. As I discuss below, this closeness to the visioning process gave me access to its inner workings, allowing a level of depth that could not have been achieved solely through interviews or document analysis. Additionally, as a facilitator every document related to the visioning process itself was given to me. Since these documents were effectively the property of the consulting firm, it would have been difficult if not impossible to retroactively assess these documents as an outsider. Finally, the facilitative role I played here allowed me to contribute my skills most effectively. While participating in any sort of argumentative role was not allowed, the facilitators neutrality fit well with my additional role as researcher and allowed me to broadly assess the process.

Since many of the conversations with participants and facilitators contained politicized information and were undertaken with a certain level of trust between the participant and I, I do not identify participants. Importantly, this chapter largely focuses on the generalities of the process itself. My intention is not to point fingers or lay blame for instances where the process fell short or where unappealing decisions had to be made. Instead, I try to take apart this process of city building in an effort to understand both how it was done and how it could be done better.

### *First Steps Toward Visioning*

In May of 2006, The City of Columbia convened a meeting during which approximately 400 members of the community showed "unequivocal support" (LeBlanc 2006a) for conducting a visioning process. In September 2006, the city government completed a bidding process with the decision to hire ACP Visioning and Planning, Ltd. (a consulting firm based out of New York City and Columbus, Ohio, hereon ACP) to facilitate and train volunteers. Having run the initial forum

in May and having unanimous support from the Sponsors Council (a group composed mainly of administrative level officers of local educational institutions), their return to the community was welcomed. ACP was chosen because they seemed more fun, more inclusive, and less bureaucratic than others and emphasized that visioning "is not a top-down project" (Leblanc 2006b).

In an overall, retrospective sense, it would seem that this consulting group was chosen in part because they had a demonstrated ability to help develop consensus around a specific project. In the past, ACP's efforts have been generally directed at creating one major project; for instance, in Chattanooga, TN they pushed for an aquarium. A fact that followed in Columbia as they consistently offered suggestions for finding or creating a big project.

Primarily, the consultant's contract was for organizing the process and the final document. It is important to note here that neither ACP nor the city government played any role in wordsmithing and here was a constant emphasis on the entire process being citizen-driven. In their role, which may be misunderstood as minor, they primarily trained facilitators and created the sequence of events, each with their own catchy and clever title designed to draw more people in ("Imagine Columbia's Future," "BIG (Big Idea Gathering) Meetings," and "The Community Choices Workshop"). In their role of training facilitators and organizing meetings, ACP did not teach facilitation skills. Instead, they taught me and all other facilitators how to conduct meetings through the use and application of their documents, thereby streamlining and organizing both the information and style of reporting.

In the end, I had more than a few conversations regarding the *overly rushed* organization of the process and the near obsession with *form-based reporting*. The nature of the contract and the framing of the process created a



very limited time frame during which everyone was supposed to agree to what could fit on the allotted form given for that session. Coupled with the intention to turn the final document into a guide for planning the city, this format influenced the outcomes of the process and therefore the future of the city while alienating participants from what was initially portrayed and perceived as an inclusive democratic process.

Despite the usual and expected outpouring of cynicism directed toward the city government, there was great support for this process. In fact, many of my early conversations revolved around seeing more than just "the usual suspects" in attendance. Of course, while it was repeated, it was also conjecture and hard to articulate the difference between participants in this visioning process and other city based engagement processes.

#### *BIG Meetings to Start Things Off*

It was just prior to the BIG meetings when I first experienced facilitation training and started meeting members of ACP, the vision committee, and the sponsors council. There are two important moments in this stage of the process and I will briefly treat each in turn. First, the facilitation training demonstrated the style in which the following meetings would be conducted. Second, the many ideas that emerged from the BIG meetings created the framework for the substantive content of the entire process.

In facilitation training I learned that, whenever possible, ACP was going to provide the facilitators with an *exact script* to follow and push reporting into tightly *organized forms*. The voices of the community were supposed to emerge through the documents and the training sessions. As facilitators, we were walked through instructions that offered exact details for every aspect of the BIG meetings; including: organizing the physical space of the room, the words that

should be spoken to the group, the methods of note taking, the methods of keeping the group to the scripted process, and the methods of dealing with arguments between group members. As would happen in all future meetings and “training sessions” where ACP was present and included, the consultant read our instructions verbatim from the documents we were provided and left the last few minutes for questions.

I facilitated a 2 hour group session at each of the two BIG meetings and the process was rushed for both groups. After arranging chairs for the number of participants and taping appropriately folded sheets of paper with written questions to the walls, as instructed, I made comments about the general value of visioning in an effort to garner an interest in the process, to give a reason for participation, and to invite participation. Then I launched into the scripts provided.

These scripts were, unsurprisingly, treated as ridiculous. Participants were instructed to get comfortable, take a deep breath, close their eyes, "and imagine [themselves] ten, fifteen, or twenty years from now... living in a city where [their] most cherished ideas, dreams, and expectations have been realized". Of course, getting comfortable, closing your eyes, and entering a fantasy world in a room full of strangers in tiny plastic elementary school chairs was no easy task and as soon as I started each meeting everyone laughed and asked if they had to have their eyes closed.

After my groups were able to get over the initial absurdity and we went around the room in a silent brainstorming session and then, as instructed, I began having participants list ideas and I wrote them down. Participants wanted to discuss ideas but were pressed to list and rank them instead. In fact, it is important to note that the final section of our instructions for the BIG meetings

indicated discussion was a “*Difficult Situation!*”

### **Recording of Ideas**

*What if an individual tries to discuss ideas instead of merely listing them?*

Behavior such as discussing ideas rather than listing them, arguing with ideas as they are presented, asking the discussion leader to rule on duplications, and engaging in side conversations should be prohibited as it occurs. A participant who says “I’m not quite sure of this idea. Perhaps we should discuss it,” should be encouraged to simply list the idea with an assurance that adequate discussion time for ideas will follow. (ACP Meeting Instructions)

Time and again during these two hour sessions I was asked why we had to rush. My feeling was to work through the discussions necessary to develop at least a semblance of mutual understanding but my training had taught me that, if the forms were not filled out, the ideas would not be cataloged and would therefore not matter. Importantly, this pressure to rank ideas and complete forms worsened through the duration of the visioning process and the indicated “adequate time for discussion” never really came. If you were not prepared to fill out the appropriate form and get it in on the appointed day then you and, implicitly, the process participants were threatened with exclusion. I was repeatedly asked, “why must we rush when the idea is to gather all the ideas possible?” and “why are we ranking the ideas if all of the ideas are supposed to matter?” While the ready response to this question from ACP was that our time is limited and the ranking was needed to simplify reporting, some groups let their meetings run long and listed all of their ideas without ranking them. Furthermore, this ranking tendency made little sense when, in the end, *all* of the ideas generated in the BIG meetings were considered in the formation of topic groups.

While these frictions may sound simple they indicate underlying tendencies that returned throughout the visioning process. The organization of

the scripts was such that they seemed silly to *every* person I spoke with, including some of the acting representatives from ACP. Where most wanted to get down to business and talk about ideas, we consistently wasted time trying to tell people to take a deep breath or *rank* the ideas they wanted to *discuss*. The organization and scripting of this process was such that it mildly stimulated discussion but worked to ensure this discussion did not go far. We were told that the goal was to get a diversity of ideas, that all ideas were to be cataloged and kept for future reference throughout the project; yet, at the same time, every group was made to rank the ideas because *only* ranked ideas were reported to those in group meetings during the closing moments of the BIG meetings. In this process an open dialogue was stifled through the use of strategies that were perceived, at best, as entertaining and, at worst, wasting what little time was available, in fact, time for adequate discussion *never* arose.

#### *From Big Ideas to Citizen Topic Groups*

ACP organized the ideas from the BIG meetings and decided to create 13 citizen topic groups for going forward to the next step of the visioning process. This was fairly simple in the sense that broad topics were fairly evident from the BIG meetings and grouping the extensive list of ideas basically required the legwork of transcription. Since participants were provided with a full list of ideas, there were no complaints about this part of the process and there seemed to be no concern about ACP manipulating or eliminating output from the BIG meetings.

Everyone who attended the BIG meetings was invited to continue in a topic group of their choice and participation in these groups was closed after they met twice to help maintain consistent progress. At the "kick-off" meetings in January of 2007, participants were asked to choose one of the thirteen topic groups, go to an area designated for that group, choose a subtopicoup they felt

suiting them, review the ideas from the BIG meetings, make sure the subtopic divisions were accurate enough to move forward, and finally, applications for cofacilitators were requested. Like the meetings to follow, there were highly specific scripts and forms handed to all facilitators for execution and completion. Furthermore, as I would later discover, neither a general process overview nor advance instructions for future meetings were to be provided. Instead, we were given instructions one meeting at a time.

The cofacilitator position was interesting in that it required the facilitator to remove themselves from a participatory role, positioning them as a "non-partisan". Of course, none of the facilitators were entirely detached and distant. In fact, we made personal attachments to each other to the extent that I still have lengthy, friendly, and informal conversations with many participants when meeting and, even at this writing, I still work as a consultant with one of the cofacilitators from my topic group. Despite developing friendships, we did work to play the role of facilitator and cataloger by maintaining a non-argumentative stance.

In this role, I noted that the two hour time span for each meeting always left us rushed as large swaths of this allotted time was spent arranging the room, figuring out what it was we were supposed to be doing, and trying to get our groups discussion to fit into the provided forms. Importantly, the group in which I chose to participate and was elected to help facilitate was the largest of the thirteen topic groups. Our groups experience of the visioning process was not as ACP's documents had intended it. Instead, with the extent of ACP's training on dialogue being a set of instruction sheets handed out prior to each meeting, we had to innovate on dialogue techniques and alter many engagement strategies. Working with a local professional co-facilitator was extremely beneficial for the

Vision Committee and my topic group in this respect as we all received more content rich and practical suggestions for maintaining a good discourse among the topic group members.

Importantly, the fact that there were moments of resistance to the drive for form based reporting indicate that the structural organization of the process was *not all powerful*. While ACP insisted that all reporting came through on a form, members of the topic groups and facilitators simply refused to follow these orders. This resistance was organized around the assertion that our words and ideas did not fit into the simplistic forms. While frustrating to ACP, our facilitation approach pleased participants. The power of these organizational principles was not dominant and resistance was quite common. In these instances, the visioning committee (the facilitators and “board of directors” who were half selected from the community and half elected from participants) always sided with the desires of the community and forced ACP to deal with the shifting process.

#### *From Topic Groups to a Vision for the Future*

Using the list of ideas and themes generated from the BIG meetings, each subtopic groups drafted a broad goal statement that reflected the nature of the BIG ideas and offered a general direction for the future. These goals continue to play an important role in local political process today. Following the development of goal statements, an “Exploring the Vision” workshop, with the purpose of reviewing and rating all topic group goals, was held for both process participants and community members. After goals were agreed upon subsequent to reviewing the ratings of the “Exploring the Vision” workshop and after each topic group completed a community resource scan with the comments from this workshop in mind, each topic group generated a set of strategies and action

plans to offer steps the city should take in working to achieve each of the pieces of the vision. If there were no resources available or the subtopic group was unaware of available resources, they suggested specific methods (action plans) to accomplish their particular goals and strategies. Finally, the work of the topic groups was completed after everything was once again reviewed and ranked by the public in the "Community Choices Open House".

It is important to note that the "Exploring the Vision" and the "Community Choices" workshops were the only time allotted for broader discussion of the plan, whether across topic groups or with the community. In these brief workshops then, participants were asked to review and rate the work of many community members across a wide array of subject. It is hard to imagine that anyone could adequately come to a conclusion about such a breadth of information in only a few hours. Thus, the workshops were largely conducted to quite those who might complain and to try to integrate available community resources and organizations into the vision plan. On this latter note, despite being conducted in a short period of time, these workshops did manage to gather a great deal of valuable community input regarding the already ongoing work of various organizations. In this respect, although it was difficult to adequately assess all of the data, the events served as useful networking forums for many organizations.

This process all sounds quite simple when listed in this manner but completion of this rather comprehensive project took each of the groups much more than the officially allotted two hours a month between January and October of 2007. Each of the subtopic groups primarily worked independently and, in doing this, generally required a minimum of one additional meeting per month at a minimum of two hours each. It is important to note that, *despite being rushed,*

these moments in the process were experienced as positive by most of the topic group members because we worked to create an open and friendly environment for dialogue.

In allowing our subtopic groups to stray from the meeting agendas as they saw fit, we allowed them to run their own meetings. By the fourth set of topic group meetings we, as facilitators, would merely remind the groups of deadlines and occasionally step in to help them move past points of contention. Overall, while some meetings became heated, it was quite impressive to see people from such disparate backgrounds and with such widely varying opinions come to agreement and create specific goals, strategies, and action plans. Despite being participants in a somewhat poorly structured process, the community worked to develop mutually agreed upon language.

Importantly here, the poor structure of this process alienated a number of participants. While agreements were reached in the end, a great deal of possible discussion was cut off in the name of meeting the hard set process deadlines. One particular instance is useful for illustrating this point with some clarity. In the beginning, facilitators and *subtopic* groups had been informed that after they created goals and strategies, they would be given time to come together again as a broader *topic* group in order to assess all of the goals and strategies. When the time to regroup came around, this overall assessment was not on the agenda outside of the two brief public review meetings I mentioned above. For some reason, ACP had promised things that the participants were never intended to receive. Since this was not well received my group of facilitators put this general review on our already busy agendas.

While we meant well, we actually created an argument that could not be resolved in the allotted time. Particularly, there were five members from various



subtopic groups who could not agree with the wording of certain strategies. As a wordsmithing discussion turned into an argument and time ran short, I was forced to call a vote in order to achieve the necessary resolution for reporting and four of these five members abandoned the process entirely. This was not the only time members would leave the process in protest of the frictions between a minority position and a majority vote. There was no choice but to move forward in order to accomplish the goals ACP had in place, but this tendency to relentlessly pursue our end goal silenced and excluded voices throughout the process. Instead of encouraging *ongoing dialogue*, the organization of this process was such to encourage *completion of a specific task*.

### *Ideals of Implementation*

The primary role of the members of the vision committee was facilitation and the important moments in this part of the process have already been highlighted; however, when the citizen topic groups had finished their work, our role changed from organizer to writer. Where ACP and the visioning committee had worked to be as "hands off" as possible in the facilitation stage, the creation of the "Final Vision and Action Plan" was completed without direct involvement of or input from the citizen topic groups. The negotiation of both the structure and the content of this document are important for understanding this process as a whole.

As soon as the citizen topic group output had been proofread and approved by the groups, the members of the vision committee met with ACP to discuss the shape and nature of the final document. Although we were under the impression that the vision committee was tasked with the writing of the final report, we were informed that it was part of ACP's contract to write the final plan. Through some negotiation, we came to the decision that this was fine, as long as

the work our citizen topic groups had done to write cohesive documents could be included in appendices as written. This decided, all of the documentation went to ACP and we waited for a month and a half to get their report in return.

During this time spent waiting, we were informed that we had two choices. On the one hand, we could choose to take our time and wordsmith the plan written by ACP. If we made this decision and the city had to wait too long for the report, the budgeting process was such that they would have to go ahead and start budgeting money to the things they believed to be important. On the other, we could choose to be happy with all the good work we had done and sign off on the final plan so the city government could implement it as soon as possible. In this sense then, the push to rush the release of the Final Vision and Action Plan mirrored the rushed process as a whole.

When the first draft of the Final Vision and Action Plan returned to our hands we were given one week, the week over Thanksgiving of 2007, to read and check the entirety of this important 200 page document. Here I first focus on the implementation chapter written by ACP. The chapter itself starts out in an expected fashion:

Because of the great range of possibilities, successfully implementing Columbia's vision will depend on several factors, beginning with the ongoing will and commitment of leaders and the citizens of Columbia to achieve the goals and strategies contained in this document. However, that commitment is not enough. The success of *Imagine Columbia's Future* will also require that governmental institutions, business, civic and educational institutions, individual citizens, and community-based organizations proactively work together more closely than ever before. To accomplish that it will require the creation of an implementation body that represents and can convene the diverse forces that can help implement the vision. (5.2, October 2007)

It would seem to be a generally accepted principle that a broad community

“buy-in” is necessary for any successful process. On the other hand, the final sentence would prove to develop into an important friction between ACP's plans and the organization of city government.

ACP suggested the creation of a two entirely new committee's, the first was the “Imagine Columbia's Future Implementation Committee”, to be created by “the city”. The committee was to be short lived, with the only assignment being to:

act as an implementation broker, assigning implementation tasks and convening individual and organizations needed to focus on the implementation of specific strategies of the vision. This process of sorting out responsibilities and identifying Implementation Groups should be done with input from the Vision Committee and should be guided by recommendations contained in the vision's Action Plans. (5.3, October 2007)

On the surface this may not seem like a particularly challenging or odd idea, but to the Vision Committee, it was the first in a series of impractical suggestions that implied reinventing the whole process for no apparent reason. Furthermore, ACP suggested that we abandon the citizen driven nature of the process and have the City Manager select members of this committee. This first misstep, particularly when, as previously indicated in Chapter 3, there is distrust of city staff and administration, was a major error for ACP and indicated that they really had very little knowledge about the community. It was becoming increasingly clear that ACP had a process that they had copied and pasted into a community in which it did not fit.

As the chapter progresses, ACP suggested the creation of an *additional* “Management and Oversight Entity” (*emphasis mine*):

The Vision Management and Oversight Entity could be an ad-hoc entity or a formal organization. In both cases its job is to

ensure that implementation of the vision moves forward successfully, and Annual Goals and Strategies Report Card is completed, and results are consistent with the vision statements and goals set forth by the “Imagine Columbia’s Future” process. The entity will ensure that Implementation Groups convened by the Implementation Committee receive assistance through their activities. Some of these Implementation Groups will find their tasks relatively simple and of short duration; others will spend many hours and perhaps years on their assignments.

The entity should be supported by staff and should be set up to go out of business within a period of five years. If the entity is set up as an informal organization it could be funded by and hosted at the City or it could be funded by channeling contributions through an existing not-for-profit organization. If the entity is set up as an independent formal organization it could seek status as a not-for-profit organization. *The burden of creating a new organization is offset by its clearly defined activity span.*

The entity will perform a number of tasks that include: *providing staffing support to Implementation Groups coordinating Implementation Group activities to avoid and eliminate duplication of efforts; and conducting periodic reviews and reporting on the progress of implementation to the community.* This final task is critical to sustaining the community’s interest and support for the vision. (5.3-5.4, October 2007)

Again, none of this may sound entirely surprising, but when taken in the context of the already existing structure of city government the recommendations make little sense and cemented my negative impressions of ACP, if not the rest of the Vision Committee's impressions. The key element here is that The City of Columbia already had (and has) a significant emphasis on citizen participation in government through Boards, Commissions, and Task Forces. As one member of the Vision Committee wrote in a note circulated during a meeting, ACP was “vague about details”, the “Implementation structure [lacked] oversight and accountability to citizens”, and was apparently “entirely unaware of the existing commission structure in the City”.

In the discussion surrounding ACP's Implementation chapter, the Vision Committee found it so problematic the chapter was removed from the final plan entirely and replaced with a introductory letter written by Committee members. In

this letter at the front of the Final Vision and Action Plan the following principles were unanimously approved by the Committee to drive implementation (*emphasis mine*):

First, the Visioning Committee recognizes that, as implementation progresses, *adjustments in the specific action steps and strategies will necessarily be made* as those strategies are integrated with other ongoing activities within the community, new information is obtained, and new people become involved. In implementing the vision, however, the *vision and goal statements* of the various Citizen Topic Groups *should be a constant guide* that both informs the changes to be made and sets a standard against which the outcomes of various changes can be measured. Second, in implementing the vision, the City and other governing entities should also act to *ensure ongoing public outreach and dialogue among diverse community segments* throughout the implementation process, as well as oversight by entities accountable to the public. This is consistent with the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and openness that have characterized the visioning process to date. Third, the Visioning Committee recognizes that there are limited resources, both monetary and non-monetary, for implementation. Thus, both to further the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and openness and to make the most efficient use of funds, *implementation of the vision should utilize and build upon existing structures and resources.* (S-2, December 2007)

The key elements of the frictions between ACP's drive to complete the process and the desires of the Vision Committee to respect the citizen-driven nature of the process should be clear at this point. What the Vision Committee strove to do in this instance was to imply that civic participation should become a normal element of everyday life in Columbia's political process. Instead of, as ACP explicitly suggested, ignoring and recreating the already existing structure of government, the Committee suggested better utilizing that structure in order to ensure an ongoing community dialogue.

#### *Implementing the Vision*

Following the official end of the visioning process, I began working with on

of my topic group's cofacilitators in a professional capacity, I job I still hold today. One of the key recommendations from the Vision Committee was to create an Implementation Report. Initially, as recommended by the Vision Committee's letter on implementation, the Assistant City Manager was going to take the reins and begin doing the legwork of writing a report that was outlined as following:

This report should begin with a recommended grouping of related goals and strategies set forth in the visioning report and include an inventory both of existing efforts and new resources required to accomplish the identified goals. This report should identify and recommend existing City or County commissions or boards that could take the lead in implementation of the various groupings of goals and strategies.

Using the Citizen Topic Group action plans as a guide, the initial draft implementation report should also identify specific implementation tasks that could be completed over the next two years. In addition the report should identify additional organizations and entities, that could be involved to work with the lead designated commissions or boards discussed above, in implementing the Community Vision and Action Plan. Any additional resources required for implementation should also be discussed in this report. Finally, the draft report should include guidelines for the convening, management, and coordination of citizen groups that can aid the work of the various boards and commissions in order to both maintain the open dialogue that has occurred in the visioning process to date, and also to enhance the public understanding and acceptance of the vision and related implementation efforts. (December 2007, S-3)

It is important to note that the Assistant City Manager had been a key steward of the visioning process for the city government so it was no surprise that she would be the one to shepard the next step of the visioning process; that is, doing the work of better connecting the vision with the city government. Unfortunately, the Assistant City Manager had to take a leave of absence to take care of her terminally ill husband and the consulting firm I now work with took on the role of drafting the implementation report. As I came to learn, the gap between the ideal future outlined in the vision and what government was already

doing or could not do was quite large, a gap that largely originated from the fears of city staff and management.

One of the key historical tensions outlined earlier arose in the development and creation of a council-manager form of government, when those opposed spoke of the manager as antidemocratic and those in favor spoke of the manager as efficient. This tension has never entirely disappeared and today can be observed in a distrust of city staff and management. While there is little evidence to give weight to theory that city management doesn't care what the community thinks (management initiated and maintained the vision process with staff after all), the pervasive distrust is a constant concern for those who do the work of keeping the city functioning. In this instance, the City Manager and ACP decided to prohibit city staff from participating in the visioning process. In addition to missing important resource people, when it came time for visioning participants to conduct their "community resource scan", the distrust of city staff made it such that participants did little in the way of asking staff what the city was already doing. As a result, many of the strategies and action plans indicated as directions the city should take were already underway, completely impossible, or actions that the city simply could not undertake. Thus the implementation report was a necessary additional step to take in order to reconcile these gaps.

It took my consulting firm an additional two years of meetings and analysis to write the Implementation Report. In doing this we met with members of City Council and the County Commission, representatives of every City Department, and community members. Importantly, we created a report that was written *exactly* as the Vision Commission indicated in the paragraphs copied above and, as indicated, we:

(i) circulated [the report] for comment to the Sponsor's Council, the Visioning Committee, and those groups and organizations identified in the action plans as being necessary for implementation; (ii) posted [the report] on the City's website for public comment; (iii) revised [the report] as may be appropriate to incorporate comments received; and (iv) presented [the report] to the City Council for review. (December 2007, S-3)

In the writing of this report we spent our days comparing the information gleaned from interviews to the content of the visioning report to figure out how to bring vision and reality closer together, grouping similar goals from the 13 topic groups into 7 goal groups to simplify and streamline the report for easier assessment, holding public meetings to gather feedback on our report drafts at every step, and rewriting the Implementation Report to reflect the comments gathered. At the end of this process we released a 200 page report to City Council that included all of the elements called for by the Vision Committee and an extensive 57 page appendix that listed comments gathered in meetings and efforts on outreach.

Unfortunately for us, regardless of the roles we had played as participants in the Visioning process and regardless of the role we *actually* played as implementation consultants, we came to be treated, derisively, as "consultants in the employ of the city manager" by some people in the community. I can really only speculate as to the reasons for this distrust of consultants but it would seem somewhat of a holdover from the distrust of city government more generally.

While this distrust has not been reduced by the continuous efforts to engage citizens, city staff has internalized many of the core elements of the visioning now implementation process. Today we see recommendations becoming reality and engagement becoming a part of the more general vocabulary employed by the community. Although it may have been difficult to



be on the receiving end of a certain degree of community distrust, it is important to note that we played a key role in helping make the Final Vision and Action Plan an integrated component of the everyday governance of The City of Columbia.

### *Tensions*

In organizing and conducting the visioning process, ACP established a system of social relations and accountability, generating controls over the visioning process which were incomplete and met with resistance. Throughout this process I noted three interrelated contradictions that I have worked to outline in this story of imagining the future of Columbia. First, the process itself was supposed to be open and inclusive, controlled only by the will of the community; however, we used scripted instructions and were consistently told to restrict the groups to the task at hand and force their output into the provided forms. One can only speculate about the *cause* of these process decisions, but the *outcome* was such that some were alienated from the process, causing damage to the already fragile trust between city and community. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, this distrust already exists as a local historical tension, it already exists as a part of the stage upon which this visioning process was set. While it is hard for me to believe that ACP knew or attempted to know much about the history of Columbia, they nonetheless stumbled over what should have been a fairly apparent roadblock.

Second, we were constantly reminded that, since this was an inclusive and open process, all of the ideas matter, nothing was to be left behind, nobody was to be forgotten or marginalized; yet, the forced ranking and voting constantly worked to marginalize and exclude people and ideas from a thorough, ongoing dialogue. In the end, even though many citizens participated, this left many of

the citizen suggested strategies out of touch with reality. There were many interesting and exciting ideas for how to accomplish the goals outlined in the “Final Vision and Action Plan” but the lack of time for a thoroughly informed dialogue *maintained* the distance between citizens and those who do the work of governance. Thus, for instance, some of the strategies were impossible and others were already underway. This failure to adequately connect city and community made it such that *another* report was required to complete the circle between idea and implementation and even more people distanced themselves from this process that was beginning to look increasingly pointless. In trying to point the community toward an agreed upon direction for the future, this step was perhaps the most counterproductive.

Third, while we were supposed to be conducting a democratic dialogue, we were constantly rushed and told that, if we were too slow, ideas would be left behind and money would be allocated without community input. Again, to belabor the point a little, this process rush caused alienation, driving people away from the process instead of drawing them in.

Each of these closely related contradictions was in tension throughout the visioning process. Through understanding these tensions in developing an imagined future, we can better see ways to move forward and create more effective and efficient processes. Furthermore, we can begin to see that future imagined by the community more clearly. In a broader sense, these contradictions outline the same tensions that exist between the alienation created by capitalism (Lefebvre 1991; Marx 1976) and the dialogue many believe is necessary to create and maintain a deeply inclusive democracy (Green 1999). While the nature of capitalism, no matter the brand, has been to rush headlong into the future with technology as the only guide (Marcuse 1991), the nature of

dialogue is organized around working toward a consensus guided by the parties involved (Green 1999). I do not intend to claim dialogue eliminates difference or can give solutions to our problems with inequality; instead, I am arguing dialogue can work open conversations at the point where the pressures of capitalist ideology work to close it off. Every move toward exclusion and alienation is a move away from a deeply inclusive democracy and, as we develop more inclusive forms of democracy, we can develop more inclusive visions for the future. As we continuously build the stage upon which we experience life, we can continuously work to build a better stage.

If there is any sort of core to the patterns of global capitalism that emerge through this story however, it is that things are not as settled and structured as they sometimes appear. In academic circles there has been a long standing debate as to whether or not the nature of capitalist development is creative or destructive. What this particular episode has shown is that it can be both. While we were often rushed through procedures and forced to work complex language into restrictive forms, participants and facilitators resisted and in the end both ACP and the topic groups created approximately half of the content in the final plan. More importantly, when the vision committee assessed the final write-up, we were able to eliminate ACP's suggestions to both scrap the citizen driven nature of the process and to reinvent the structure and process of governing the city.

This is no small point, instead, it is the possibility for a newly imagined city politics. Through the pursuit of a politics that includes the community and streamlines participation, this process opened the possibility for more inclusive frameworks of power (Clegg, 1989) and participation (Green, 1999). With the goals of restructuring the everyday and broadening participation in the production

of the ordinary city, this process has opened possibility instead of closing it off with control and domination. In many ways, this is a great victory; yet, this victory must also be taken very carefully. While there was greater participation than any other planning event this community has ever conducted, we did not hear *all* voices. While it is clear that this was not a holistically just process, it is also clear that this process generated far greater participation and possibility than those of the past. Through working for inclusion, we work to challenge oppression.

Importantly, this visioning process is not over and, if things go as the plans indicate, this process will never be over. By implying a permanently inclusive process, we helped to work toward permanent and growing participation in city politics. What I and many others are hoping comes from this process is the permanence of the process itself and, with this, the willingness of many disparate interests to work together toward a common vision for the future.

## Chapter 5: Columbia Lived

In this chapter I complete the perceived, conceived, and lived perspective by offering a glimpse at the best and the worst of life in Columbia today. To create this chapter I distributed packages containing a disposable camera and a notebook to a wide variety of people. Importantly, I gave at least one package to a person from each of Columbia's six wards. In the front page of each notebook I wrote instructions for participants to take two pictures. One picture is of their most favorite place and the other picture is of their least favorite place in the region. After taking each picture, residents were asked to explain why that place is important to them. After they took their two pictures, they were asked to pass the camera on to a friend. I made myself accessible for questions and for camera replacement but received no questions in regard to this straightforward assignment. In addition to these disposable camera packages, I asked people to send me similar sorts of pictures which they had already taken. Many of these images came from people who once lived in Columbia. Some of these pictures were returned without an explanatory narrative.

In telling this story of life in Columbia today, I want the reader to get a feel for this cityspace through the perspectives of its residents. In this respect, the photos and the narratives that have returned to me have a surprising consistency. This collection outlines the spaces that residents get excited and tell stories about. These spaces draw new people into the community and keep people living here. This collection also marks the spaces that create political conflict and incite stories of fear, the spaces which residents believe are problematic. Importantly, these spaces were no accident. Although many of the images returned mark parks and gardens, they were all nonetheless created over

time and through decisions made by city officials, voters, and property owners.

In the previous chapters I have described Columbia as it once was and as it could be. Historically, this community has portrayed itself as progressive and there has been a powerful interest in civic engagement and education. Over the long term, the community has grown significantly in size and in population as local governance has become more inclusive and inequalities less severe; yet, the narrative of distrust of government has continued among community members in almost exactly the same form for nearly 90 years. These frictions between stability and change and between community and government have played a powerful role both in shaping the physical and social cityspace into what we know today and in creating a variety of narratives that are employed for the political purposes of the teller.

When imagining what this cityspace could become, community members engaged in a somewhat contentious process, expressing a wide array of goals, strategies, and action steps. Later, in our role as consultants we helped to further refined those goals, strategies, and action steps and worked to connect them more tightly with the practices and needs of those who actually operate city government. In many ways, both citizens and city government have today taken significant steps down the path to making this vision a reality.

In an overall sense, this collection of photo journals does not clearly reflect the more esoteric historical themes of participation and education that have been outlined above. On the other hand, these journals do have clear and consistent connections to the imagined future and traces of our history are always present. There are several key themes that emerge in this context. First, the photo journals highlighted places of unique natural beauty. In these spaces we can see a desire to preserve or create a natural environment full of beauty. Second, the

journals offer a common opposition to poorly planned or unattractive development projects. These poorly planned spaces often drive the narratives surrounding local elections as they get used as examples emphasizing a dividing line drawn between two caricatures, one who opposes development and the other who supports business. An astute observer would note that similar dividing lines are commonly drawn between political groups at the national level as well. Third, the journals offered a glimpse at the spaces some community members fear. Whether a club, a condo, or an intersection, many places create fear among community members. Fourth, some journals followed suit with history by indicating a distrust of government. In these photos I often saw a picture of a government office or construction project which was accompanied by a narrative describing a specific event or series of events that sparked the writers distrust. Fifth, the journals reflected a common theme by highlighting contradictory narratives regarding to the same spaces.

Most importantly, each of the spaces marked by these journals indicates an important piece of this community's memory and a salient aspect of that photographers self. In capturing these pieces of life, we can begin to actually see the narratives of the community that have been explained above. Through this collection of images taken as a whole, the contradictory self of this cityspace emerges from the narratives of its residents.

### *Spaces of Natural Beauty*

One key theme that emerged from the visioning process was a consistent emphasis on natural beauty. Whether you look at the Economic Development or Environment topic groups, all of the participants regarded environmental preservation and protection as a common interest for the future of the community. In this same respect, most of the photographers who contributed to my project

returned pictures of their favorite outdoor spots. Some of these spots are more personal (i.e. in the backyard) but most of the pictures received were taken in one of the city's many parks.

The importance of parks cannot be understated in this instance. While many communities are working to reclaim urban greyfields, the Columbia community has long supported the expansion and preservation of parkland through a local tax. These parks and backyard preserves therefore indicate long-term planning efforts that worked to make this cityspace pleasant for those who live here and appealing to those who might. Additionally, these park spaces serve to create connections between community members who might otherwise never meet. As one journal indicated of their favorite park, “ [it] seems to be a place at which there are no strangers, at least among the dogs and their companions. I have often hiked for a couple of miles chatting away with someone whom I've never met before and will never see again.” To illustrate these places that draw people in, I have included three examples below that highlight the personal and the public.





Figure 5.1 – Dogs and Park



Figure 5.2 – Stephens at Sunset





Figure 5.3 – Backyard Beauty

### *Spaces Lacking Beauty*

While I received an array of beautiful photos of favorite places taken in parks and backyards, I received a similar array of photos of least favorite and frightening places taken in parking lots and intersections. In these journals there was a specific emphasis on spaces that were perceived to be poorly planned. As one writer indicated of the parking lot at the Crossroads Shopping Center, it is the “[m]ost poorly designed large parking lot in Columbia. Difficult access and egress from any direction. Long aisles, no turnarounds except at ends. 'New entrance coming soon' - but when?”

Like the many parks, these public spaces were planned on paper before they were created in concrete. It is through the strategic utilization of this knowledge that some residents create narratives in opposition to those who have been a part of planning these undesirable spaces. While the story of the legal structures and events that are a part of any planning process is always complicated, the narratives later created to oppose the outcomes of those planning processes are often greatly simplified. Yet, as I previously illustrated, the “truth” of the matter is not as important as the story told today and in these journals I found this same contradiction between the distrust of city government and the desire for planning these spaces more effectively to improve them in the future. Thus, while some residents utilize these spaces for narratives of opposition to contemporary politicians, others utilize them for exemplars of what not to do as we imagine the future.

It is important to note here that participants in the visioning process were excited about the many places of beauty in this cityspace. I can say with certainty that the places noted in the journals as poorly planned were not on the list of beautiful spaces needing preservation. I have included two examples

below to highlight the lack of beauty which community members experience in this cityspace.



Figure 5.4 – Parking Lot



Figure 5.5 - Intersection

### *Spaces of Fear*

Some of the photo journals indicated least favorite places as those that generated fear. In addition to the images indicating a fear of intersections and roadways, I received several images that reflected the photographers distrust of authority and several that reflected the fear created by a lack of authority. From those who fear the heavy hand of authority, I received several journals regarding the police station as “the worst” and “the scariest” place in town and one that indicated a neighboring street as their least favorite place because “the cops are everywhere.” For the poor and working class community and particularly for the black community that faces such high rates of incarceration nationwide, the very *presence* of authority incites the fear of imprisonment.

On the other hand, as some journals indicated, the *absence* of this same authority incites fear in those who see police as a form of protection. While many will see the image of the entrance to Rolling Rock Condominiums below as a standard subdivision entrance, the one who captured that image sees it as a marker for a space of fear that lacks authority. The journals indicate that the specific spaces feared vary depending on the person but they are fairly consistently portrayed as either “havens for crime” or as a location for the concentration of authority. Thus, for those who live within and around these “havens for crime”, the experience of constant police pressure is a reason for fear and for those who live elsewhere, the perception of high rates of crime is a reason for fear and therefore greater police presence.

In these contradictory narratives lies the long standing friction between the progressive promise of equality and the pervasive reality of inequality. By exploring instead of continuing to avoid this friction we can develop new bonds of trust. Without working to develop this trust, there can be no real progress toward



the world this community has historically pursued and imagines for the future.



Figure 5.6 – Rolling Rock

### *Spaces of Distrust*

As is common in the rest of the United States, these journals reflected how many in this cityspace demand or utilize government services on the one hand while complaining that the government can't do anything right or shouldn't be involved in their lives on the other. This feeling of government failure and inefficiency, regardless of how rational or irrational, is a real feeling and has a powerful influence on today's local political discourse.

As this perception of political polarization has grown, the strength of opposition to “government interference” has also grown. This distrust has been best (and perhaps most comically) expressed in the journal entry associated with the image below. This journal indicated the Department of Motor Vehicles as their least favorite place “because the people are not helpful.” While we certainly require a great deal of coordinating services to be delivered by local government, these smaller interactions in which community members feel betrayed by their public servants serve to further feed the narratives of distrust.

As we have already seen, this distrust pops up in many narratives throughout the history of Columbia. While one respondent indicating the DMV as their least favorite place may seem small, I utilize this particular journal entry to highlight the importance of these smaller everyday experiences in shaping the broader narratives that flow around both the practices of governance and those who govern.





Figure 5.7 – Government Distrust at the DMV

### *Contradictory Narratives*

On a few occasions the photo journals returned pictures of the same place with differing descriptions. In the same way that pieces of history and pieces of the vision for the future have been pulled together and utilized for contradictory politicized narratives, specific spaces evoke entirely contradictory responses from one person to the next. While there is a consistent agreement in the journals in regards to both the spaces that should be regarded as beautiful and marked for preservation and the spaces that were poorly planned and should be recreated, spaces that are used for specific social activities received contradictory treatments.

Interestingly, *all* of the spaces indicated as both most and least favorite places across different respondents were restaurants, bars, or nightclubs. Whether one likes or dislikes a service establishment in this context, the responses are clearly oppositional. For instance, in response to the Déjà Vu Comedy Club, one respondent writes “Great comedy, drinks, and dancing” while the other simply writes “ug. Enough said.” Similar responses arise in regards to a local strip club called Club Vogue. Where one respondent sees it as a space for “relaxation” after “a hard day at work”, another marks it as least favorite because “[t]he buildings are unsightly and rundown and I think it is questionable for a strip club and a bar to be so closely located to a school.”

Although differing narratives around restaurants, bars, and night clubs may not be as politically exciting as those surrounding the Land Clearance Redevelopment Authority detailed above, strong responses are nonetheless reflected in these journal entries. In the everyday lived experience, it does not take an important political battle to evoke emotion.



Figure 5.8 - Déjà Vu



Figure 5.9 – Club Vogue

*Conclusion: Spaces of Memory*

Perhaps most importantly, these photo journals always returned images and descriptions of spaces that are relevant to the everyday lives and experiences of the photographer. Through their descriptions, the photographers conveyed a sample of their lived experiences in Columbia. Whether positive or negative, past or present, these lived experiences couple with narratives of memory and imagined futures to constitute the life of this ordinary cityspace.

In the lived experiences presented in this chapter there are connections to the threads of history and the imagined future. Where many praise well planned beauty, they also deride poorly planned ugliness. In the broader sense, this gap between good and poor planning has been a source for a great deal of opposition and distrust in the history of this community. In political processes past and present, residents have drawn on their life narratives and their experiences in contemporary spaces to tell their stories and to make arguments for the future they would like to create.

If there is any lesson here, it is that we can find a better future through *exploring* the frictions that emerge in these contradictory narratives. In this example for instance, exploring the friction between the well planned spaces of beauty and the poorly planned spaces of ugliness can help those who govern better understand what it is that community members want to see. At the same time, this friction can be utilized to help teach members of the community why and how these particularly unsavory decisions were made. Working together with this knowledge in hand, both parties can develop more effective decisions and decision making process. In the process we don't necessarily reconcile the emergent contradictions but instead move forward and through them.

With so many different narratives flowing within and through cityspaces,

the photo journal project can serve as quite a valuable methodological tool for capturing the pieces of this narrative flow. In Columbia's narratives, community members praise green spaces, oppose spaces that are perceived as poorly planned, fear spaces that are perceived as lacking or overflowing with authority, indicate a distrust of spaces operated by government authority, and sometimes have entirely different perceptions of the very same spaces. While a project such as this could never truly reflect *all* of the narratives in any given community and these narratives will almost certainly vary across communities, it does serve as a practical method for illustrating the commonalities and contradictions that run through community narratives. By exploring these frictions in the everyday we can begin to understand the experience of living in a given ordinary cityspace. Bringing these narratives to life through photo journals then gives us a feel for both the perception and the experience of cityspace and in tandem with developing an understanding of space as perceived and conceived, a well developed picture of this ordinary cityspace becomes clear.

## Chapter 6: New Beginnings

In this dissertation I have offered a variety of stories. Stories told by academics, stories told by historians, stories told by Columbian's, and stories told by myself. The importance of narratives to this work cannot be understated and, on this same note, I must also note that a different narrative could likely be told using the same information I have gleaned over the years. In writing this concluding narrative I return to some of the reasons I began this research in the first place and offer a few suggestions as to how I believe we can continue to improve the world in which we live.

### *Returning to the Core*

The drive of my research and, more generally, of my life is to make some valuable contribution to our society. As this particular piece of research has progressed over the years and I have gained a greater understanding of the function of city government in the Columbia community, my respect for the people who devote their lives to the creation of this city has grown. At the same time, my respect for *all* of the people who create cityspaces around the world has grown. Despite the cynical outpourings of so many social commentators, there are a great many people in the world who are doing everything in their power to create equality. Whether you seek to apply your skills to local, state, national, or global organizations, I can almost guarantee that there are people working to solve the problems that you believe to be most salient. If there is no such organization, I *can* guarantee that you can find people to help you make your dream a reality. The work *is* being done.

In all this it is of course hard to ignore the tides of history. Looking back at



the Columbia of the past and at the Columbia of today, prosperity has been and is still concentrated in the hands of few, mirroring the rest of the capitalist world. Many of those who have historically struggled for their rights to be respected still struggle to gain any sort of foothold today. In the land of the Cinderella story, we can never forget that the inability to achieve one's dreams can result in great ruin. While the persistence and stickiness of inequality has driven many to claim the need for revolution, we have seen policies that decrease the gap between rich and poor and certain times in our history and over the longer term, conditions have improved for many. I believe that, given time, we can continue to find new ways to make our world more equal.

### *Equality in Democracy*

As a sociologist interested in democracy, I believe one way we can begin to achieve these greater levels of equality is through establishing the necessary governmental structures to engage communities in the creation of their own cityspaces. In conducting the research you have read above and as a member of the Columbia community, I have worked to forge a path for integrating these structures into local governance. The visioning process was an interesting and compelling engagement process and, most importantly, the product created by the community members and the Implementation report that followed continue to influence the process of governance.

Importantly, there will be no revolution here. Instead, it seems far more likely that we will continue to see slow evolutionary changes in our structures of governance. In Columbia for instance, the application of civic engagement is growing within city government. Some simply give lip service to the language of engagement to make themselves look better for their electorate but others actually speak the language of engagement and are working to integrate citizen

driven policy making processes into the everyday activities of local governance. The importance of civic engagement is in fact growing on all fronts as more people realize that the "wisdom of the crowd" can be harnessed to make complex and difficult decisions. In some places around the United States civic engagement is really beginning to become structurally integral to the processes of governance (for instance, see Seattle's "Countywide Community Forums").

The emphasis on *structures* of governance here is an important one. While an engagement process is a good way to get your community on board with the outcome of difficult decision making processes, engagement alone does not create the authentic relationships and expanded knowledge needed for real progress. By creating clear structures through which community members can engage in the creation of cityspace, we can create an environment of mutual learning. In spaces of dialogue, city staff can get a better grasp of the many narratives that make up a community and community members can begin to understand the vast complexities required to operate any given cityspace. As these sets of narratives begin to cross paths, common grounds and new ways forward can be created.

### *Narratives of Possibility*

It is in these new paths that I see the greatness of possibility. Instead of assuming we can all get along together and come to some singular agreement, I argue along the same path as Sen (2009), that we can sometimes agree to disagree and move on with life. It is not in *agreement* that we can find greater equality, instead, it is in the creation of structures of engagement and in simply opening the *possibility* for discussion that we can begin to develop trust between the various narrative streams that make our communities what they are.

Developing the bonds of trust must be a central goal in the growth and



expansion of engagement processes. To build this trust, the structures of governance have to begin to accommodate input from a wider variety of sources. In Columbia for instance, one of the greatest shifts in this direction I see today is in the increasing inclusion of the disabled community. Access is important here and as those who govern begin to be reached by the influence of a wider variety of narratives their decisions will shift. Over time, as these narratives begin to intersect, greater trust can emerge. This is, of course, a long and difficult path as trust is hard won and fast lost. Yet, without building space of dialogue and working towards greater trust, we will never achieve equality.

While the daily news cycle makes it is easy to see uncaring and callous humans populating our government, the reality on the ground seems far different. In Columbia and in many other communities around the nation, these shifts in governance are already underway. Because steering our federal government is like operating a barge, I argue that the more nimble boat of local policy is the most practical of areas through which these structural changes can be made. As more cityspaces begin to engage their communities we can develop a greater understanding of exactly how to build trust and engage everyone in our local environments.

### *Engaging Locally*

In our culture, local communities offer the greatest possibilities for engagement than we can find at the state, national, or global level. While the White House's "Open Government Initiative" has been an exciting national level process, it is difficult to develop any sort of committed citizenry in such a broad process. As more government agencies begin to make their plans and actions citizen driven, I believe we will see a more devoted and engaged body politic emerge. Yet, I do not believe that this will result in greater equality in our society.

As many practitioners and theorists alike have argued, we need greater attachments to places in order to engage communities in the democratic process. The simple examples of “Not-In-My-Backyard” protests against development illustrates this point. People in communities grow attachments to the cityspaces they inhabit and when unsavory changes are proposed, people will come out of the woodwork to protest. While many who govern fear these moments of conflict, it is in these moments that we can truly begin to engage communities. Through harnessing this outrage and turning it into creativity, more satisfactory developments can be created.

Although it serves as a useful moment for increasing engagement, those who govern do not have to wait for conflict. Instead, by outlining clear possibilities for citizens to become a part of the policy development process, conflict can be altogether avoided in the first place. Whether making the development process clear or by asking citizens what it is they want the city to look like in 20 years, every moment of engagement builds narrative bridges between various interests within any given community. As these narrative bridges emerge, resolutions to difficult and complex issues will also emerge.

Importantly, any sort of valuable democratic engagement requires a literate population and, even more importantly, this population must understand the context in which policy processes occur. As we saw in the visioning process, citizens can have great ideas that are entirely impossible or that the government has already begun implementing. This can be taken in a variety of ways but it does indicate a lack of understanding of city government among citizens. Instead of separating citizens and staff as our local visioning process did, it is key to build bridges between the two (we do all live in the same community after all). Again, as we build narrative bridges between these groups, we can begin to

forge a place where the two can meet in at least a partial resolution of the issues at hand.

### *Engaging Sociology*

For sociologists I think the lessons here are more complex. In this work I have engaged with the concepts of a wide variety of academics, all of which have a significant influence on my thinking. Yet, my interest in sociology does not mirror the broader interests of our culture. Much of what is written by sociologists is read by only a limited few and generally irrelevant in the sense of the daily media cycle. The most ironic irrelevance for me is that even the study of and theorization regarding public participation seems distant from the practices of participation. Even those sociologists clamoring for public sociology are writing only for sociologists.

This is a field that gazed at its navel so long its neck has become frozen in position. When social scientists interact with the broader public the tension of the knowledge hierarchy is present and the scientist often claims knowledge of their subject's world over and sometimes against that subject. I feel this tension when, for instance, members of my community seek to continue filling our prisons with small time drug offenders. I *know* that this policy is an utter failure. Yet, I must also admit that the narrative held up by these members of my community is something believed and something believed is something real.

This tension between the narratives of academia and of our broader culture is not to be avoided with frustration. Instead, it is in exactly this instance that the academic can do the greatest service to their community. Through an active engagement with the discussions that shape the future of our cityspaces, the academic can bring their specialized knowledge into the body of public knowledge more generally. The difficult lesson to learn is that dialogues are not

to be won with facts, they are to be negotiated with reason and rationale. Interestingly, this is one of the first lessons learned by a practitioner.

### *Learning from Columbia*

Overall, this has been a story about the City of Columbia, Missouri and my faithful reader will have a fairly good idea of the shape and feel of this cityspace. As we begin to make the inevitable comparisons from one city to the next, I think the key lesson here is that any given community is created through the narratives of its residents. As these residents (including city staff!) interact with their friends and coworkers, ideas about the city and about its future emerge. In order to harness the power of our communities, we must understand that each of these narratives has validity even if it does not have accuracy.

While it is easy for a given individual to ignoring the stories and the people they dislike or disagree with, it can be terribly destructive for a government to do so. The key lesson for those who work to engage their community then is to understand the narratives that surround the issue you plan to engage. We should of course continue to gather socioeconomic and other measurable data about our communities but we need to begin including narratives as a component of our data sets as well. Data is important but without context and understanding this data can be badgered into representing specific interests.

There are some efforts to being down this road in Columbia and other communities. In Columbia, our new Office of Neighborhood Services will serve as a central coordinator between citizen and government, providing a clear access point to the answers that citizens may have. While the people who work in these offices will get to know a great deal about the narratives of community members, there is no clear for these narratives to work their way further into city government and thus the office could come to be perceived as a filter instead of

an access point.

Importantly, I am not claiming that we must listen to and respect absolutely every single voice that speaks or yells in a community. When people spread falsehoods and inaccuracies, they are to be rebuked. This sort of manipulation for power will only maintain the relationships between city and community as oppressor and oppressed. On the other hand, when people selflessly devote their lives to the betterment of the community, their words should be listened to and respected.

### *Into the Future*

For me, Columbia has long been home. Looking into my future, it is uncertain as to whether or not I will be able to continue living in my home. Even from someone who has had the privilege of attending a major University, the job market is not entirely appealing. As I discussed earlier, the chances of employment are even more dire for the working class community and there is a sense of hopelessness and resignation among many of the nation's jobless poor. In times like these we can find the greatest innovation and it would appear that we are doing little to support and expand on that innovation. While many seek loans to create or sustain their own businesses, lending has grown so tight that a vast swath of our population has lost what may seem like their final opportunity while the bankers who brought so much devastation have already largely recovered.

What I seek here is no quick fix to the issues we face today. Quick fixes are merely patches to systemic problems that require significant attention. Instead, I argue for the integration of citizen engagement into the everyday practices of the creation of cityspace. While a better democracy will not solve all of our systemic problems, it is an important measure that can begin to lead us

down the path of collaboration that is required to address the many problems we face. Within capitalism, Marx saw revolution. Within cityspace, I have come to see liberation through collaboration.

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## **VITA**

David Overfelt has lived in the City of Columbia for nearly 22 years and many of his family members originate from or reside in Missouri. His studies emerge from a practical interest in applying sociological knowledge to everyday reality. In this process David has taught students sociology, brought this knowledge to local political processes, and worked in a wide variety of environments as a consultant and facilitator. Overall he wants to build bridges between people in an effort to create a better and more collaborative world.