IV. A NEW CENTURY

The 1925 City Plan

Cincinnati’s 1925 City Plan, the first of its kind in the nation, was an attempt to bring order to urban chaos. To shape growth, the plan proposed new zoning regulations and specific solutions to traffic snarls, including new thoroughfares through city neighborhoods, new traffic patterns through downtown and more public transit.

The plan showed a clearer sense of civic institutions and squares in the vicinity of Central Parkway, stretching from City Hall to Music Hall, and wide boulevards to a redesigned Lincoln Park and along Court Street.

Lincoln Park

In step with the City Beautiful movement at the turn of the 20th century, Cincinnati initiated a plan for an improved citywide park system. Consulting landscape architect George E. Keller laid out a grand scheme of parks and parks in the 1920s. The main park in the entire West End, it was a picturesque landscape with a lake, willow tree, public baths, a ball field and tennis courts.

By 1900, most middle-income families had left the West End. New immigrants, often impoverished and from backgrounds that ill prepared them for life in a crowded urban setting, further contributed to congestion. While a few working-class families remained, the area was quickly evolving into the largest and poorest slum in the city.

During World War I, the black community in the West End grew considerably. The wartime shortage of labor encouraged blacks to move to Northern cities to take factory jobs. The West End, with plenty of cheap housing, became home to large numbers of these immigrants. By 1925, almost 80% of the city’s 18,000 blacks lived here, while most residents of other ethnic backgrounds, including East European Jews, had moved out.

As population density increased and housing deteriorated, conditions in the area worsened. Buildings were crowded onto lots as narrow as sixteen feet; many homes were literally falling down. By one account, some single-family dwellings housed as many as a dozen families. In most places 80% of the land was built over. Often the only open spaces were the streets.

Nevertheless, the black community in the West End had a strong sense of identity developed and expressed through its institutions. There was a multitude of churches, some located in the ornate buildings of earlier, more affluent Christian and Jewish congregations, and some in storefronts.

Nor were all the residents of the West End poor. The neighborhood was home to numerous black tradesmen, entrepreneurs, and professionals. The Cotton Club, modeled on its Harlem namesake, brought jazz greats and other celebrities to Cincinnati in the 1920s and 1930s.

Crosley Field

From 1912 to 1970 Crosley Field, at 1200 Findlay Street and Western Avenue, was the home of the Cincinnati Reds. Originally known as Redland Field, it was renamed Crosley Field in 1914 when the Reds were owned by Cincinnati businessman and inventor Powel Crosley, Jr. Rainfall during a storm in 1913 was one of the most notable events to take place in this ball park.

By the late 1950s, both the city and the club were dissatisfied with the old stadium. The West End was by then a slum, and driving and parking there were difficult. The 1946 Metropolitan Master Plan called for a multi-sports stadium to be built on the riverfront just east of the Suspension Bridge. Twenty years later, ground was broken for Riverfront Stadium and on June 24, 1970, the last game was played at Crosley Field.

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