

GENTRIFICATION THROUGH THE EYES (AND LENSES) OF KANSAS CITY  
RESIDENTS

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by

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# GENTRIFICATION THROUGH THE EYES (AND LENSES) OF KANSAS CITY RESIDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Gentrification is a process where the middle class migrates to decaying or predominately poor areas of a city and changes the landscape. Since the phenomenon was first recognized in the 1960s in London, it has spread to cities of all sizes across the globe, and has morphed into unique versions of the original process. Kansas City's downtown has recently experienced gentrification, especially new-build gentrification in the past decade. Few studies presented in the gentrification literature utilize a qualitative, bottom-up method to understand the process. This thesis uses the photo novella method, which involves use of photographs and interviews, to do understand residents' perceptions of gentrification in downtown Kansas City. The results show that gentrifiers have an idealized perception of how downtown should look and operate, which includes an aesthetically pleasing, functional, and authentic landscape that is accessible, historic, and diverse. Homeless residents feel unwelcome in the gentrifying landscape.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Gentrification is a process changing the landscape and dynamics of cities all over the world. The process involves the movement of the middle class into blighted or working-class areas of a city. This group of people, known as gentrifiers, initially buys, renovates, or repurposes housing and businesses in the area. The city gets involved, participating in public/private development projects. Subsequently, more gentrifiers move into the area, bringing their middle-class values into the neighborhood and changing the look and feel of it.

Gentrification has evolved over time. Since the process was first recognized in the 1960s, cities have seen different waves of gentrification with each subsequent wave involving larger-scale development (Lees et al. 2008). It is now expressed in different forms, such as new-build gentrification, super-gentrification, and tourism gentrification (Lees et al. 2008). In some cases, gentrification itself is an urban development strategy used to put a city on the global stage (Smith 2002). And whereas gentrification has occurred extensively in such large cities as New York and London, it is moving down the urban hierarchy to mid-sized cities and even small cities and rural towns.

The gentrification literature tends to take one of two positions on the value of gentrification: gentrification as a positive phenomenon or gentrification as a negative phenomenon. Scholars who believe in the first see gentrifiers as urban pioneers who improve or “emancipate” derelict urban landscapes and encourage tolerance among residents (Lees 2000; Ley 1996). Scholars who believe in the second see gentrifiers as

warriors, “taking back” the city by displacing the poor (Smith 1996). In the literature, there is a lack of synthesis of these two perspectives.

Kansas City is one of the mid-sized cities that has been influenced by gentrification. Until recently, the downtown area had been losing population and lacking in investment since the end of World War II. Gentrification began in a few neighborhoods downtown in the late 1980s and continued through the 1990s. Large-scale, new-build gentrification followed and increased throughout the 2000s. During the past decade, the population of downtown Kansas City grew by about 6,000 people and the amount of housing units almost doubled (Collison 2010a).

This thesis presents a qualitative, case study of gentrification in downtown Kansas City using the photo novella method. The goal of the research is to understand how residents, both gentrifiers and non-displaced poor, perceive gentrification. To collect data for this research, I dispersed single-use cameras to residents of downtown and instructed them to take photographs of the positive and negative features of their neighborhood, especially focusing on changes to the area associated with gentrification. I then interviewed the residents individually about the photographs they took and about what living downtown is like for them. Thirty people participated in the research.

This research is important because it presents the residents’ perspectives in a gentrifying city. I did not approach the research with the goal of determining whether gentrification is good or bad, like much of the existing literature concludes. Instead, I approached the research inductively, letting the residents’ perceptions guide the analysis. As an alternative to focusing on one gentrifying neighborhood or one phenomenon such as housing or displacement, I gave the research a broad scope by recruiting participants

from all over downtown with varying incomes and ethnicities. This thesis contributes to the literature a rich, bottom-up understanding of gentrification.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Sense of Place

Early writers in humanistic geography were critical of positivistic methods and theories being used in the discipline in the post-World War II era. They disagreed with the reductionism and the separation of the researcher from the subject in science. They moved toward qualitative, interpretive methods and strove to ground their research in the lived experiences of real people, following in the footsteps of phenomenologists (Tuan 1977; Relph 1976). According to Edward Relph in *Place and Placelessness* (1976), place is something that humans experience every day, but they rarely question the nature of place. Relph took a phenomenological approach to understanding this taken-for-granted dimension of life, which he felt should be accurately described before it could be fixed if it were ailing. His approach has been reproduced and developed by other humanists (Seamon 2000), and the research presented in this paper was inspired by humanism's exploration of the underappreciated aspects of place in everyday life.

Place can be defined in different ways; John Agnew and James Duncan (1989) define place in three ways according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*: "It can mean 'a portion of space in which people dwell together', but it can also mean 'rank' in a list ('in the first place'), temporal ordering ('took place'), or 'position' in a social order ('knowing your place')." But to humanists, a place exists within space and is a repository of meaning. Places are created when humans attach significance to them (Tuan 1977, Relph 1976). Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) describes place as being a pause in space where humans

relate to their environment. This pause is where humans develop a sense of place (Tuan 1977).

Sense of place can be “both an interpretive perspective *on* the environment and an emotional reaction *to* the environment” (Hummon 1992). Relph (1976) explained that a person’s sense of or identification with a place will be stronger or weaker depending on the degree to which they feel inside or outside of the place. All people have varying degrees of insiderness and outsiderness in a certain place; feeling *inside* a place means feeling attached to it or identifying with it, and feeling *outside* a place means feeling alienated from it (Relph 1976). Because of these differing degrees of insiderness and outsiderness, places have many different identities (Relph 1976). Since the concept was introduced in the 1970s, sense of place scholarship has extended beyond the work of geographers and into such disciplines as anthropology, philosophy, and sociology (Feld and Basso 1996).

Place is a concept with which theorists have had difficulty agreeing on a definition. Complicating matters are various place-related concepts such as sense of place and place attachment and the related terms of sense of community and community attachment. These different concepts have been developed by in multiple disciplines. Sense of place is similar to the concept of place attachment; the former is generally explored by geographers, while place attachment is associated more strongly with environmental psychology, whose practitioners, like humanistic geographers, study place meanings (Trentelman 2009). Place attachment can be defined as “an affective bond or link between people and specific places” (Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001). It includes

connections between environmental, biological, sociocultural, and psychological processes (Altman and Low 1992).

Place attachment studies have been approached both qualitatively (Milligan 1998; Mitchell et al. 1993; Stedman et al. 2004) and quantitatively (Kyle et al. 2004; Williams et al. 1992). The literature on place attachment is larger than the sense of place literature (Trentelman 2009). The study presented here is guided by the concept of sense of place, rather than place attachment, for two reasons. The first problem with the notion of place attachment is that “attachment” assumes a positive association between the subject and the place (Trentelman 2009). Sense of place, on the other hand, leaves open the possibility of the subject having negative or even fearful (Tuan 1979) feelings toward the place (Trentelman 2009). Another unfavorable aspect of place attachment, in the context of this study is that its traditional subjects have been tourists, visitors, and recreational users (Trentelman 2009). Sense of place studies focus more often on a place’s residents or people who have a longer or more permanent history with a place than the attachment subjects (Feld and Basso 1996; Trentelman 2009). This study focuses on residents of downtown Kansas City, and I wanted to explore both the positive and negative meanings that those residents attached to their neighborhood. Finally, place-attachment studies tend to quantify the phenomenon of “attachment” into parameters that can be quantitatively measured and interpreted. This study, on the other hand, is designed for a more holistic and qualitative approach. The sense-of-place literature provides rich examples of this sort of study.

Place becomes even more complicated, however, when one considers the concept of “community.” Community and place are so similar that they are often confused for one

another, though community is most often found in the community sociology literature, whereas place is more often found in geography and environmental psychology literature (Trentelman 2009). The two concepts are so intertwined that distinguishing them is difficult. Different discourses on community have emerged, but some generalizations can be made about the theorization of community for the purposes of this study. Community has been defined as “both a physical setting for social relations (place) and a morally valued way of life” (Calhoun 1980). John Agnew (1989) suggests that place has been theorized as a crucial aspect of communal interaction. Over the course of the twentieth century, community has also been critiqued as part of a dichotomy in which society and community are pitted at opposite ends of a continuum (Agnew 1989). With modernization and globalization in the last century, community has been lost and society has become more dominant (Agnew 1989). Since place is tied with community and community has lost significance, place has, by consequence, been significantly devalued in the sociology literature (Agnew 1989). As such, community is seen as overshadowing place, so community sociologists often leave place out of their writing (Agnew 1989). But as Agnew and Calhoun suggest, community and place remain fundamentally connected, and the study presented in this paper works from this assumption.

As place is intertwined with community, place attachment and sense of place are also related to community attachment. Community attachment is “a measure of sentiment regarding the community one lives in and an indicator of one’s rootedness to one’s community” (Trentelman 2009). Rootedness is a concept coined by Tuan (1980) and often used in the sense of place literature, so it is clear that sense of place and community attachment are sometimes conflated. David Hummon (1992) uses community attachment

and sense of place to mean essentially the same thing, and suggests that both concepts are interdisciplinary. Some opinions suggest that sense of place and community attachment differ, however. Carla Trentelman (2009) has argued that community attachment studies usually only refer to the social aspects of community. Rather than focusing solely on social interactions within a site, this study focuses on meaningful interactions with society *and* the built environment, so sense of place, a concept that covers this broader and more holistic understanding of interaction, is the most appropriate conceptual foundation for the study.

While humanistic geographers are concerned with place, a related concept is landscape, which is most commonly explored by cultural geographers, although not exclusively; humanistic geographers study landscapes as well. Cultural studies is older than humanistic geography, but the “new cultural geography” that began to develop in the 1980s with such scholars as Peter Jackson (1980; 1989) and Denis Cosgrove (1983), draws ideas from humanism (Mitchell 2000). The new cultural geography strove to understand how culture and society shape daily life with a political lens, focusing on “power, dominance, and the control of space and culture by elite groups” (Mitchell 2000). Some authors (Cook and Crang 1995) even conflate cultural geography and humanistic geography because they have many similarities and both use ethnographic rather than positivistic research methods (Johnston and Sidaway 2004).

Postmodernism was integrated into the cultural turn in geography and throughout the social sciences. Postmodernism marks a break with modernism. The “high modernism” that became dominant after 1945 was “positivistic, technocentric, and rationalistic” (Harvey 1989). Developed as a reaction to modernism in the early 1970s,

postmodernism denounced rational, universal “truths” and coherent representation of the world, instead embracing marginalized points of view (Harvey 1989). Don Mitchell (2000) explains the difference between modernism and postmodernism well:

*Put another way, postmodernism stresses heterogeneity, whereas modernism is accused of seeking homogeneity; postmodernism looks to multiple, competing discourses, whereas modernism seems to always want a single ‘metanarrative’ capable of explaining everything; postmodernism is infatuated with the indeterminacy of language, knowledge, and social practices and the elusive search for ‘meaning,’ while modernism stands mired in the overweening and impossible desire for self-contained explanation, for rational action in the face of perfectly knowable processes and actions.*

*Landscape* has many definitions. To some, landscape means scenery, which can include natural elements or the built environment (Tuan 1974). Landscapes portray what is happening in space at a point in time (Tuan 1977). A landscape, like a *place*, is where multiple meanings are stored (Cosgrove 1984). It is the world that we see, but it is also a constructed representation of the world (Cosgrove 1984). By studying landscapes, we study the landscape as a subject, but also the human agency which created that landscape (Cosgrove 1984). Donald Meinig (1979) believed that landscapes can be interpreted in ten ways: landscape as nature, habitat, artifact, system, problem, wealth, ideology,

history, place, and aesthetic. Because the concepts of landscape and place are intertwined, both are used as foundations of this study.

## **Gentrification**

The American urban landscape has changed drastically since World War II. The centrality of the inner city was challenged when white flight and suburbanization led to the blighting and disinvestment in downtown areas across the country after WWII. “Urban renewal” public works projects became popular in the 1950s and 1960s. These projects were grown from a modernist ideal; their aim was to solve urban problems from the top-down. Many urban renewal projects were modeled after the “successful” ones of Robert Moses in New York City, who cleared sections of the city for modern, clean-cut housing towers and interstate highways. Today, these planned attempts at urban renewal are generally seen as unsuccessful (Bennett 1990).

In her classic work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jane Jacobs famously critiqued the modernist urban renewal projects, contrasting them with the vibrancy of Greenwich Village in New York. She proposed that the ideal neighborhood had the “four generators of diversity”: mixed-use, short blocks, diversity of building age and types, and a high-density of people (Jacobs 1961). By moving to Greenwich Village and fixing up an old house, Jacobs unknowingly participated in a new, bottom-up type of urban renewal: *gentrification*.

The term “gentrification” was first coined by Ruth Glass in 1964, who applied it to London as a process where:

*One by one many of the working-class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes—upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages—two rooms up and two down—have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences ... Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.*

Although this definition is quoted in most of the gentrification literature, much of that literature goes on to explain how the definition has shifted. Since Glass’ time, debates have ensued over the meaning of gentrification as well as its causes and consequences (Doucet 2009; Lees 2000; Lees et al. 2008).

Gentrification has been expressed in different forms, the first and most basic being “classical” or “first wave” gentrification, which refers to the phenomenon that Glass recognized in the 1960s. In this form, “pioneer gentrifiers” or “brownstoners” from the middle class take over housing in working-class neighborhoods, and working-class residents are displaced (Lees et al. 2008). In 1979, Phillip Clay developed a model of classical gentrification: stage one involves a “small group of risk-oblivious people” who move into vacant housing in a small neighborhood; stage two involves the same type of people moving into the neighborhood, expanding it, but housing begins to become scarce and some displacement occurs; the third stage involves media attention and larger-scale investment by developers. Working-class behavior is looked down upon, and the neighborhood is generally viewed as safe at this point by gentrifiers; stage four involves

even more residents, but these are wealthier and more risk-conscious than the original gentrifiers, and their presence sparks high rent costs and more private investment. This model does not necessarily describe subsequent and current patterns of gentrification because the process has shifted with time, but it is useful in understanding classical gentrification (Lees et al. 2008).

Although gentrification traditionally begins with the grassroots in-migration of residents, there is almost always involvement from the government and private developers. Some scholars have discussed how state involvement in gentrification has changed in terms of the process' three "waves," each ending with a recession (Hackworth and Smith 2001; Lees et al. 2008). The classical gentrification that Glass observed and that Clay modeled has been described as the first wave. This "sporadic gentrification" occurred in the 1950s and 60s and involved small-scale, localized public-sector investment (Hackworth and Smith 2001). Private-sector investment was seen as too risky, and the public-sector was interested in fixing urban decline (Hackworth and Smith 2001). The second wave began after the 1973 recession and is described by Hackworth and Smith (2001) as gentrification's "anchoring period," when it became more widespread, spreading to smaller cities. Second-wave gentrifiers were wealthier than first-wave gentrifiers. This wave consisted of the integration of gentrification with cultural redevelopment strategies, including the development of "renaissance" symbols such as art museums and concert halls (Gotham 2005). It also consisted of more public-private partnerships than the first wave (Lees et al. 2008). The third wave in the mid-1990s was even more corporatized and linked to even larger-scale capital (Hackworth and Smith 2001; Lees et al. 2008). Private developers were more of the initiators of gentrification

rather than pioneer residents, reworking entire neighborhoods with more involvement from the state (Lees et al. 2008). Some neighborhoods outside the city center saw gentrification during this wave as well (Lees et al. 2008). These three waves most commonly appear in the literature, but Lees (et al. 2008) suggests that a fourth wave is occurring now, with financing from national and global markets. It has been noted that the dates for each of these waves is flexible, and each city experiences gentrification uniquely (Lees et al. 2008).

Gentrification has become a “global urban strategy” (Smith 2002). Gentrification is spreading down the urban hierarchy to smaller cities such as Cleveland, Ohio, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Glasgow, Scotland, and of course, Kansas City (Smith 2002). And whereas it began in North America and Europe, it is now spreading across the globe. Reports of gentrification have emerged from Tokyo, Sao Paulo, and Cape Town (Smith 2002). As an urban strategy, planners and policy-makers now plan top-down gentrification. They have supposedly learned from the failures of the state-sponsored modernist urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 60s, and are creating large-scale, more integrated urban renewal plans (Smith 2002). The new agents of gentrification are not the new middle class; they are corporate, government, or corporate-government partnerships (Smith 2002).

Other forms of gentrification include new-build gentrification, super-gentrification, and tourism gentrification (Lees et al. 2008). New-build gentrification differs from classical gentrification because it involves developers building new housing, such as condominiums, and consumption spaces instead of only rehabbing old buildings (Lees et al. 2008; Zukin 1991). Super-gentrification, or regentrification, is gentrification

imposed on an already-gentrified neighborhood, thus does not take advantage of the rent-gap and involves an even higher level of financial investment than classical gentrification does (Butler and Lees 2006; Lees et al. 2008). Tourism gentrification involves the development of corporate tourism and entertainment venues alongside residential development (Gotham 2005; Lees et al. 2008). It is worth noting that there are other forms of gentrification, but they are not as relevant to this study.

Scholars think and write about gentrification in various ways. There is a debate in the literature about whether gentrification is produced due to structural forces, or if gentrification is driven by consumption values of the new middle class (Lees et al. 2008). Some scholars argue that gentrification is *produced* by disinvestment in the inner-city and the “rent gap,” which refers to the difference between a place’s actual value and the value it could potentially hold at its “best use” (Smith 1996). In this view, gentrifiers are opportunists who take advantage of the rent gap that already exists. Criticisms of the production explanation argue that it poses all gentrifiers as investors and discounts their individual non-economic values and behavior (Lees et al. 2008).

Other scholars argue that gentrifiers seek to *consume* a particular aesthetic and experience that is not based on the economic factors of the structurally-produced explanation of gentrification (Jager 1986; Ley 1996; Lees et al. 2008). These consuming gentrifiers make up the “new” middle class, who are less conservative than the “old” middle class, and who moved to the inner city in search of a particular sense of place (Ley 1996). The new middle class is drawn to neighborhoods where they will feel at home near their peers with similar middle-class values, but will also feel like their neighborhood is cool, vibrant, and diverse (Lees et al. 2008). A paradox is at play

however, within the new middle class: they want diversity yet they tend to self-segregate (Butler 1997). This sense of place is also supposedly facilitated by the historic or aesthetic landscape not available in the suburbs (Jager 1986; Ley 1996). Jager (1986) recognized the “gentrification aesthetic” in Victoriana, Melbourne as “buying into history,” extensively remodeling old buildings and restoring their “historical purity,” and getting rid of any working-class signifiers that might be present. Eventually, “gentrification kitsch” emerges, where imitations are produced for the consuming gentrifiers (Jager 1986). Developers and investors produce housing such as lofts as a type of cultural commodity (Zukin 1989). The consumption explanation of gentrification has been criticized as focusing too much on the consumption needs of the gentrifiers and not enough on the production of space by developers and investors (Lees et al. 2008). Also left out are the consequences of gentrification (Lees et al. 2008).

As gentrification has progressed from pioneer-led to corporate-led, the idea of *authenticity* has emerged as a significant concept in the gentrification literature. Edward Relph (1976) wrote about the ways in which places are experienced authentically or inauthentically. His conservative notion of authenticity suggests that one’s sense of place is authentic if it is direct and genuine. Sharon Zukin, who has written many books and articles on authenticity, argues that authenticity is a bourgeois term, and can only be observed from outside of itself (2010). The new middle class desires to consume the authentic neighborhood in a struggle for roots lost by suburbanization (Zukin 2010). One conception of the authentic neighborhood is the urban village. The term “urban village” was first used by Herbert Gans (1962) to describe an ethnic enclave of immigrants who adapt their rural lifestyles to the urban context. The term has evolved from Gans’ original

use to mean a mixed-use neighborhood with “identity and individuality” (Taylor 1973). Zukin (2010) suggests that though gentrifiers praise the local working-class or ethnic “authentic” establishments in urban villages, boutiques and cafes, and then chain stores soon move into the neighborhood. Another conception of the authentic neighborhood involves “historic” buildings and the aforementioned gentrification aesthetic. But Zukin (2010) suggests that the gentrifiers who claim authenticity by attempting to return a building or landscape to its historic state, actually hold power of authorship over the landscape, molding it based on their personal tastes. By changing the urban village and by molding the landscape aesthetic, gentrifiers do the opposite of what they intend to do: they make a landscape inauthentic (Zukin 1995, 2010). On top of that, new-build and tourism gentrification coupled with sanitization of public space have further homogenized gentrified landscapes, creating “Disney World in the streets (Zukin 1995; Lees et al. 2008). This homogenized landscape is discussed as an element of “postmodern urbanism” in the Los Angeles school of urban geography (Dear and Flusty 1998).

Another debate in the literature, one closely related to authenticity, is about whether gentrification is good or bad. Proponents of the emancipatory city thesis believe that gentrification encourages tolerance (Lees 2000; Ley 1996). Both the emancipatory city literature and the new middle class literature on gentrification focus on the gentrifiers as emancipators who resist existing patterns of dominance in the city (Caulfield 1994; Ley 1996; Lees 2000). In this view of gentrification, tolerance is encouraged due to the supposed economic, social, and ethnic diversity of the gentrified neighborhood, and the process is positive for the gentrifiers and those they come in contact with (Caulfield 1994; Lees 2000). Gentrification can be especially emancipatory for “marginal

gentrifiers” (Rose 1984): countercultural or marginalized people who create niche neighborhoods—the gay neighborhood or an artist community, for instance (Ley 1996; Lees 2000). The emancipatory thesis has been criticized by some who argue that it privileges the point of view of the gentrifiers, who tend to be members of the middle class and have shared cultural practices that are different from those of the “diverse” residents who lived in the neighborhood before the gentrifiers arrived (Lees 2000). Also, the idea that diversity encourages tolerance is questioned; some argue that there is little interaction between strangers (Young 1990), and others that anxiety about strangers has led to increased fragmentation (Zukin 1995).

Proponents of the revanchist city thesis, like Neil Smith (1996), see the city as a battle zone between the middle class and the poor. In this battle zone, the middle class (and its capital) must reclaim and restructure the inner city, which was “stolen” from them by the poor and by minority groups (Lees 2000; Smith 1996). The battleground is disguised as a “frontier,” and its violent attackers disguised as “urban pioneers” in the media (Smith 1996). Revanchism, Smith (1996) suggests, is encouraged by media representations of violence and danger in the city, inducing fear in the middle class. Undesirables are used by politicians as scapegoats, blaming them for all that is wrong in the city; a famous example of this was in the 1990s when Mayor Giuliani of New York declared as public enemies the homeless, prostitutes, squatters, graffiti artists, and unruly youth (Smith 2001), and supported the development of Business Improvement Districts to keep public spaces clean, safe, and beautiful (Zukin 2010). Far from the emancipatory view of gentrification where tolerance is assumed, the revanchist view suggests that gentrification actually leads to zero-tolerance policing strategies toward the homeless and

the marginalized (Mitchell 1997). Policy-makers attempt to sanitize public space of undesirable people and introduce surveillance to attract residents and tourists (Davis 1990; Mitchell 1997). Thus, there is a paradox of public space: it is only public for the “right kind” of people (Zukin 2010). Much of the revanchist city literature has heavily criticized gentrification, citing displacement, increased rent, homelessness, racial tension, and community conflict as some of gentrification’s negative effects (Smith 1996; Atkinson 2002, 2004; Lees et al. 2008; Doucet 2009).

The gentrification literature lacks qualitative study from the residents’ perspectives. Although the idea that gentrification displaces poor residents dominates the literature (Atkinson 2002, 2004; Lees et al. 2008), others question that assumption. Some scholars suggest that the literature is unfair to gentrification, focusing too much on displacement and class-based tension (Atkinson 2002), even though the residents actually displaced by gentrification are difficult to study because they are hard to find once they have left (Doucet 2009). The displacement literature is mainly rooted in empirical methods such as census-data analysis (Jackson et al. 2008; McKinnish et al. 2010), so Lance Freeman (2006) suggests a more “balanced view” of gentrification based on qualitative methods that would include eliciting the opinions and perspectives of residents. Those long-time residents who are not displaced are also under-studied. Brian Doucet (2009) found that in Leith, Edinburgh, a third-wave gentrification city, non-displaced residents were optimistic about their city but felt out of place—that the improvements to their city were intended for the gentrifiers and the new residents (Doucet 2009).

Because the displacement literature is so prominent, gentrification has become, to some, a “dirty” word (Smith 1996). In defense of the process of gentrification, other terms essentially meaning the same thing have emerged: urban regeneration, urban revitalization, urban renaissance, neighborhood renewal, neighborhood recycling, and back-to-the-city movement (Smith 1995; Lees et al. 2008). These terms are used by developers, policy-makers, and residents to sidestep the issues of class-based and race-based tension that are attached to the word gentrification. Policy-makers and developers tend to ignore the displacement literature in favor of the emancipatory literature; they tend to make policies based on the notion that gentrification can improve amenities, access to services, and neighborhood quality (Atkinson 2002, 2004; Doucet 2009; Lees et al. 2008).

Regardless of opinion and theory on gentrification, all cases are unique because each occurs in a different place where residents, the displaced, and gentrifiers develop and operate from within distinctive senses of place. Each case study contributes to a broader, richer, and more robust knowledge of gentrification. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to contribute an understanding of residents’ perceptions of gentrification to the literature. The site for this case study is downtown Kansas City.

### **Gentrification in Downtown Kansas City**

The boundaries of downtown, according to the Downtown Council are the Missouri River to the north, Thirty-First Street to the south, the Kansas-Missouri state line to the west, and Woodland Avenue to the east (City of Kansas City, Missouri 2010). Downtown’s central business district is within “the loop,” an area surrounded by

interstates and highways. Downtown has about fifteen individual neighborhoods, or “districts,” depending on how districts are defined and counted (City of Kansas City, Missouri 2010). Downtown has seen some turbulent history and recent gentrification.

The 1890s through the 1940s was a building period for downtown, and the city was able to shake off its “cow town” image (Brown and Dorsett 1978). Nightlife thrived and retail on downtown’s “Petticoat Lane” was popular (UMKC University Libraries 2011). Though the city was known for corrupt politicians who disregarded prohibition, the Kansas City jazz that emerged remains a source of pride for locals (UMKC University Libraries 2011). Kansas City was not hit as hard as some in the Great Depression (UMKC University Libraries 2011). Many of the city’s skyscrapers and civic and cultural buildings were built in the 1930s, including the iconic art deco Power and Light building, the Municipal Auditorium, the Music Hall, the County Courthouse, City Hall, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (UMKC University Libraries 2011). But a few factors set the stage for a massive out-migration from downtown. In the 1920s, a ritzy shopping center, the Country Club Plaza, was built south of downtown, made possible by the growing automobile industry (UMKC University Libraries 2011). Parks connected by landscaped boulevards were planned in the 1890s, and by 1944 the boulevard system had been vastly expanded outward, but with no large central park (Brown and Dorsett 1978; UMKC University Libraries 2011). This encouraged the tradition of residential development near open spaces away from the economic center of the city, laying the foundation for sprawl.

After World War II, Kansas City began annexing territory, and in twenty years, it doubled in size by land area (Brown and Dorsett 1978). By 1980, it had annexed over

seventy-five percent of its territory from its prewar size (Frey and Speare 1988), and it has become one of the largest cities in the United States in area, at 320 square miles (McGrath 2007). The city struggled to keep up with the infrastructure and government needs downtown while it focused on the new annexed areas (McGrath 2007). Meanwhile, white flight and urban sprawl were occurring. Because of the annexations, Kansas City did not see much of a decrease in population, but there was a population shift away from the downtown area (Brown and Dorsett 1978). Urban decay has been a problem ever since, and segregation issues from the postwar era are still evident today.

Besides white flight and annexation, other factors contributed to the decline of Kansas City's downtown. In 1951, a massive flood destroyed many of the stockyards and businesses along the river and in the West Bottoms downtown, and much of the business never returned (Brown and Dorsett 1978). In the late 60s and early 70s, \$3.4 billion was invested in modernist urban renewal projects, many of them outside the city center and dependent on car infrastructure (Brown and Dorsett 1978). Instead of expanding the existing airport just north of downtown, a brand-new airport was built in 1969 twenty miles north of downtown (Brown and Dorsett 1978). It was built, in part, to serve as Trans World Airlines' hub, but the airline moved to St. Louis in 1982. Instead of expanding the existing downtown Municipal Stadium, the Truman Sports Complex, a dual-stadium complex for baseball and football, was built in 1971 on the eastern edge of the city where Interstate-70 intersects the beltway (Brown and Dorsett 1978). Downtown saw abandoned buildings and parking lots take over once-thriving areas (McGrath 2007).

Some reinvestment in downtown did occur in the 1980s. Quality Hill, a region on the westernmost side of "the loop," or the central business district, was redeveloped in the

early 80s. McCormack Baron Salazar used public and private financing to rehab old and to construct over 300 new apartments and condominiums in an attempt to attract young professionals already working downtown (McCormack Baron Salazar 2011). Old hotels and clubs were repurposed for commercial and residential use, but financing could not be obtained for the planned office complex and supermarket (Rebello 1992). Now the district's residences are at high occupancy, but it remains mainly a residential neighborhood (McCormack Baron Salazar 2011).

Classical gentrification began occurring in the 1980s as well. The Crossroads area lies south of the loop, and in the 1980s, artists began moving into and restoring inexpensive old industrial brick buildings (Smith 2007). These artists showed typical “risk-oblivious” behavior characteristic of pioneer gentrifiers (Clay 1979). Their presence sparked a wave of investment, and since then property values have gone up as new gentrifiers have moved in (Smith 2007). The area has become a tourist destination, re-branding itself as the Crossroads Arts District, boasting 50 or more art galleries and hosting monthly First Fridays Art Walks (Smith 2007). The district also finds pride in its many locally-owned businesses—about 70 retail stores, restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues (Smith 2007). It can now be considered a mature gentrified area.

Similar gentrification occurred beginning in the 1980s just to the west of the Crossroads in the West Side. Artists moved into the neighborhood, but instead of creating lofts and studios from industrial buildings like in the Crossroads, the new residents of the West Side rehabbed old houses (Collison 2003). The neighborhood was already residential and in 1990, the population was sixty-five percent Latino (Collison 2003). It had the draw of charm characteristic of an urban village. The West Side has retained a

percentage of its Latino residents, and therefore its Latino identity, but median income and property values have gone up (Collison 2003). This district's gentrification status can also be considered mature.

Other new gentrification emerged in the 1990s. The River District, north of the loop and south of the Missouri River, saw small-scale private development through the decade (Couch 2001). Its amenities—the river and riverfront park, and the historic ties to the city's founding and original marketplace—have made it a hotspot for new development that continues today. Alongside the city's large-scale redevelopment plan in the 2000s, the River District saw millions of dollars of investment in housing, offices, retail, and a hotel (Dillon 2008). Just to the east of the River District is Columbus Park, and the two districts are often grouped together even though they are physically separated by a highway. Similar to the West Side, Columbus Park is an urban village with large populations of Italians and Vietnamese and smaller populations of other ethnic groups (Horsley 1998). Middle-class gentrifiers began moving into the neighborhood in the '90s, an existing public housing project was downsized and updated, and developers initiated an "urban village concept" for redevelopment, as they called it, meaning pedestrian-focused development with front-porch homes near the street and hidden parking (Horsley 1998).

New gentrification in downtown Kansas City in the 2000s was large-scale government-sponsored new-build and tourism gentrification. In 1999, "support for downtown was at a record low" (McGrath 2007). But in 2001, a downtown development plan was prepared by Sasaki Associates for the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City called the Downtown Corridor Development Strategy (also known as the Sasaki Report)

(McGrath 2007; Spivak 2007). The mayor at the time, Kay Barnes, provided political support for the plan, especially its focus on housing, with the goal of creating 10,000 new housing units in ten years (Spivak 2007). Legislation was passed giving tax incentives to developers of old downtowns in Missouri (Spivak 2007). The proposed north-south development corridor included an area called the south loop at the time, where there was to be a new entertainment district and arena (Spivak 2007).

Announced in 2003, the entertainment and shopping district has been the biggest change to the city's downtown landscape in the last decade. The Power and Light District, named after the nearby iconic art deco Power and Light Building, consists of about eight square blocks located within the southern part of the loop. The area was developed by the Cordish Company from Baltimore, Maryland, and the project cost \$850 million, \$300 million of which was from public bonds (Collison 2010b). The first new Power and Light District business opened in late 2007, and by the spring of 2008, the district was picking up steam with at least fifteen new businesses open. The district now consists of retail stores, a grocery store, and over thirty entertainment venues such as bars, restaurants, music venues, and a movie theater.

Just east of the Power and Light District is the Sprint Center Arena, which was financed in 2004 and opened in late 2007 (Collison 2010a). The arena in many ways replaces the deteriorating Kemper Area, which still sits in the West Bottoms. The Sprint Center hosts concerts and sports events, and hopes to attract a professional basketball or hockey team to Kansas City (Mansur and Horsley 2010). The Sprint Center is right next to the entertainment portion of the Power and Light District so that people who go to an

event at the arena can walk across the street afterward for more entertainment, spending more money at the Power and Light District.

Other elements of the large-scale redevelopment plan were realized. Major employers got new headquarters downtown, including H&R Block and the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, and the IRS got a new \$370 million facility (Collison 2010a). Construction began in 2006 on the Kauffman Center for Performing Arts (Collison 2010a). The convention center has been renovated (McGrath 2007). According to the Downtown Council, the downtown population increased from 11,762 in 2002 to 17,120 in 2010, and housing units increased from 5,800 to 10,7000 with more planned and under construction (Collison 2010a). Community Improvement Districts were established to clean, beautify, and keep downtown safe (Rowlands 2010). Crime dropped in the loop more than in any other neighborhood in the entirety of Kansas City between 2001 and 2006 (Spivak and Vendel 2007). Tax revenues generated downtown have increased 40.8 percent between 2002 and 2009 (Collison 2010a).

The relative success of this redevelopment project is debatable. Though housing increased much more than in downtowns in peer cities that are working on redevelopment (St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Charlotte, Cincinnati, Nashville), other factors leave Kansas City behind peer cities (Spivak 2008). Although there have been multiple proposed plans for a light rail system, no decisions have been made. The Sprint Center Arena has not been able to attract a professional sports team yet (Mansur and Horsley 2010). The Power and Light District was planned to be self-sustaining, but it has not made enough in taxes to pay back the city bonds it received for development, and city taxpayers have had to contribute millions of dollars to cover its debt (Collison 2010b).

The 2008 recession is thought to have contributed to Power and Light's shortcomings. And even though the Power and Light District has not been as financially successful as planned, some believe that it has brought downtown a good reputation, reduced urban blight, and improved infrastructure (Collison 2010b).

Successful or not, Kansas City has poured more than \$4 billion into the revitalization of downtown (Spivak 2008). This investment has created a unique environment of third- and fourth-wave gentrification. Because Kansas City's version of gentrification is unique, the gentrification literature lacks research on this type of changing city. I believe that with so much changing so rapidly, the residents of downtown Kansas City are participating in and being affected by those changes, and that studying their interaction with the changes can provide new insight into the newer forms of gentrification happening today. It is the goal of this research project to understand the residents' perceptions of gentrification in Kansas City.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### Photo Novella Method

In brief, to understand the residents' perception of gentrification in downtown Kansas City, this study employed the photo novella method. I distributed single-use cameras to a sample of residents in Kansas City's downtown region and instructed them to take pictures of changes in the area. The participants were then interviewed individually, and the photographs were used to stimulate discussion and reflection.

Interpretation, or "reading," of photographs in this study assumes the notion of "images as texts" (Barthes 1987). This idea is related to the humanistic idea of "landscapes as texts," especially because photographs can be *representations* of landscapes. In literary theory, texts are seen as complex entities, each one with infinitely changing meanings (Duncan and Duncan 1988). Poststructuralists claim that the author of a text has little power, while the reader interprets the text as he or she pleases (Duncan and Duncan 1988). Duncan and Duncan apply these ideas to landscapes, claiming that landscapes are authored anonymously, and are interpreted by the readers intertextually, who ascribe their own meanings based on past experience and the nature of their current engagement or position in society (1988). The texts captured in photographs are rich with multilayered information that can illustrate complicated perceptions of place (Aitken and Wingate 1993). Although primarily visual, photographs can record and elicit, particularly in interviews and other forms of reflection, non-visual senses such as smell, sound, and embodiment.

Photographs are powerful representations of the textual landscape. When photography was first developed, photographs were called “mirrors with memory,” suggesting the idea that photographs are representations of reality (Goin 2001). Artistry in photography was not recognized for some time, and in academic literature, photographs are still widely used as reproduced facts (Goin 2001). Peter Goin pointed out in his 2001 article, “Visual Literacy,” that photographs are subjective representations from the photographer’s point-of-view, and that they can contain symbols that have meaning for the photographer that cannot be understood by others without explanation (2001).

The development of the photo novella method was preceded by other uses of photography in social science. “Photo-elicitation” or “photo-interviewing” involves a researcher showing photographs of the subject to that subject to initiate discussion (Hurworth 2003; Purcell 2007). This technique was originally used by anthropologists to study culture and rituals (Hurworth 2003; Purcell 2007). Heisley and Levy (1991) built on photo elicitation to develop “autodriving,” where interviewees are the ones taking the photographs. Autodriving was used by market researchers to gain information about consumers, but it is important to the history of photo novella because it introduced the technique of the subjects as photographers (Hurworth 2003; Purcell 2007). “Reflexive photography” is similar to autodriving, involving subject-taken photographs focused on a specific subject as triggers for discussion, but it is more focused on sociological topics than autodriving (Hurworth 2003; Purcell 2007).

The aforementioned photo-elicitation methods have been criticized as being too focused on the topics determined by the facilitator, leaving little room for the participants

to explore the issues important to them (Purcell 2007). Wang and Burris (1994) dealt with this limitation by developing “photo novella.” Instead of having a focus on a specific subject, projects using this technique ask the participants to take pictures of their everyday lives (Hurworth 2003). Photo novella is often called by different names. Resident-employed photography is one such name, and the two techniques are basically the same (Wang and Burris 1994; Larsen et al. 2007; Stedman et al. 2004). Photo novella has also been expressed in the variations of visitor-employed photography, self-directed photography, and autophotography (Chenoweth 1984; Cherem and Driver 1983; Aitken and Wingate 1993; Dodman 2003). These techniques have been used across various fields—geography, sociology, psychology, leisure studies, and health care, to name a few. Authors using the term resident-employed photography to describe their methodology include Soren Larsen, Richard Stedman, and Tom Beckley. Their studies have been conducted on amenity landscapes using this technique (Larsen et al. 2007; Stedman et. al. 2004). In Larsen’s study, he compared place attachment in long-time ranchers and residents in Central Colorado to short-term exurban residents (2007). In Stedman’s study, he looked at residents’ place attachments near Jasper National Park in Alberta, Canada, a unique take on previous work done using visitor-employed photography with visitors to high-amenity places (2004). These studies inform the study presented in this paper, as gentrifying landscapes are valued for their amenities.

A study of urban sense of place using “autophotography” also informs the study presented in this thesis. David Dodman’s look at sense of place in Kingston, Jamaica involved teenagers with different economic backgrounds, in one of the first participatory photography studies focused on urban geography (2003). His results showed differences

in patterns of mobility, access to the natural (and built) environment, perspectives on environmental issues, and variations in all of these based on gender and socio-economic status (Dodman 2003). Also through this method, Dodman was able to counter popular suggestions that Kingston youth do not have positive interactions with their environments (2003). Dodman's study is a good example of how participatory photography methods can provide new insight to a situation.

One of the most important aspects of these participatory photography methods is that they empower the participants to direct the content of the study. If an ethnographer went to a community and solely conducted interviews, the interview questions would be a reflection of the interviewer's knowledge and lived experience (Rabinow 1986). By allowing the participants to choose their photograph subjects, they bring a deeper, insider (Relph 1976) perspective to the study. The photographs can capture intimate and meaningful details about their lives and the places in their city. Also, these methods allow for participants to be reflective with their photography assignment, more so than they would be in a single interview, which lets them contemplate and capture images of the real problems, issues, or meanings that are important to them (Wang and Burris 1997; Dodman, 2003).

Because of the complexity of the content and meaning of a photograph, the interview aspect of photographic research methods is crucial to the understanding of those photographs. The interview describing the motivation behind each photograph by the participants can reveal their complex meanings, and the use of multiple methods provides triangulation (Hurworth 2003). The participants may feel empowered by the fact that the interviewer cares to listen to them and try to understand their experiences (Wang

and Burris 1997). A study involving one of these methods can be a powerful tool, once meanings are codified and compared between participants, in creating community change, in forming grassroots movements, or in communicating the needs of the community to people in power (Wang and Burris 1997).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

To begin the field work, I first created a proposal for the plan of study and submitted it to the Institutional Review Board. Once the board approved the research, I began collecting data in June of 2010. Data collection was finished in August 2010. I recruited participants initially by asking friends and family for contact information for people they knew who lived in downtown Kansas City. I also researched local community organizations and municipal agencies and reached out to them via emails and phone calls. From there, I used snowball sampling to find other participants. Through these recruitment methods, I gathered a participant base of urban professionals. I also wanted to broaden the participant base to include the perspectives of those potentially marginalized by the gentrification process—the homeless. I recruited homeless participants at a local church: Grand Avenue Temple. It is a Methodist church that has especially focused on the needs of the homeless since the mid-1990s. Today, in addition to holding worship services, the Grand Avenue Temple provides services to the homeless including food and clothing, a medical clinic, and an overnight shelter in the winter. My recruitment at Grand Avenue Temple was approved by the church's pastor. I made an announcement about the project during a worship service and spoke with

potential participants before and after the service for several weeks. Church regulars and staff introduced me to church members who were interested in participating.

Out of the thirty-six participants who received cameras for the study, twenty-five returned them to me. One camera could not be developed, so the data includes twenty-four sets of photographs. I interviewed twenty of the twenty-five participants who returned their cameras, but I also interviewed five participants who did not take photographs as well, making a total of twenty-five interviewees. Overall, there were thirty participants in this study—twenty full participants (photographs and interview) and ten partial participants (only photographs or only interview).

Each participant was given a single-use, 27-exposure camera with these written instructions:

*Downtown Kansas City has changed a lot in the past ten years. I want to know how you feel about these changes, how these changes influence your daily life, and how you think they affect downtown as a whole.*

*Use your disposable camera to take **at least 10 photographs**. I encourage you to take more than ten photographs.*

*Please take a few photographs for each of these three categories:*

- 1. Things or places downtown that you like.*
- 2. Things or places downtown that you dislike.*
- 3. Things or places downtown that you would show to a visitor to Kansas City.*

Included with these instructions was a letter informing the participants of the reason I was conducting the study and the study's potential risks and benefits and instructions on how to use the disposable camera. Also included was information on the ethics of photography (Knowledge for Health Project 2010), and photography release forms for use by the participants if they took photographs of people that included any private information.

Orally, I reviewed all of these printed materials with each participant. When presenting the photography assignment prompt, I never used the term “gentrification.” Instead, I framed the research as investigating “neighborhood change,” so that participants would document their true perceptions without being influenced by the many different connotations the word “gentrification” holds. Each participant was given about one week to complete this photography assignment. Once I had received and developed the pictures on a participant’s camera, I scheduled an interview with the participant. The average number of photographs taken by each participant was sixteen.

Each interview was semi-structured. During these interviews, I first asked each participant about his or her residential history. I then asked participants to describe the photographs he or she took and explain why each was important. While the participants were discussing their photographs, or after they were finished, I asked them more specific questions about their photographs or about relevant neighborhood change topics. On average, the interviews lasted about forty minutes.

The thirty participants do not make up a representative sample of the population in downtown Kansas City. This is because the goal of this project was not to generalize about the population of downtown Kansas City in its entirety. Instead, the goal was to generalize about the process of gentrification and perceptions of that process. The sample included nine women and twenty-one men. Only one participant had young children living at home during the time of the data collection.

Five participants were homeless at the time of their participation, and three others were formerly homeless or living with friends instead of at a residence of their own. Henceforth, I will refer to those in this group as the “homeless.” Only one of the

participants in this category was female. It was unclear to me the length of time that some of the participants had been homeless. Some told me, but others did not. I was reluctant to ask about that subject because I did not want to jeopardize the rapport and trust that I built with these participants. From the information I gathered with the question, “How long have you lived in Kansas City?” I conclude that some of them had been homeless for less than one year, while others had been homeless for over ten years.

I have categorized the remaining twenty-two participants as “urban professionals.” Nineteen owned or rented residences downtown. Length of residence ranged from less than one year to eight years, though this information is unavailable for some participants. The majority of the urban professionals (thirteen) could be considered “young professionals”—estimated to be between the ages of twenty and forty—and two of those were also “city stakeholders,” meaning they worked for a municipal entity. Four urban professionals could be considered “older professionals”—estimated to be older than forty years. Two of these older professionals could be considered “successful agers” (Allen 2007) who had raised children in the suburbs before moving downtown. Four professional residents were part of the “creative class” (Allen 2007)—photographers, writers, and architects. Three participants lived outside of downtown: one worked downtown and was exceptionally knowledgeable about Kansas City’s architectural history, and the other two were city stakeholders. Out of the nineteen non-homeless residents of downtown, the locations of eighteen of their residences is known. Three lived in the Crossroads, Financial, Quality Hill, and River Districts, two lived in the Library District, and one lived in the Columbus Park, Government, and Union Hill Districts each.

These two major categories of residents—homeless and urban professionals—emerged in the sample. I had originally planned on categorizing my sample differently when the project began. I had hoped to compare the perceptions of urban professionals and homeless residents with those of low-income residents. However, I was unable to find a significant number of low-income (non-homeless) residents to participate in the project. In addition, I had hoped to compare the perceptions of long-term urban professionals with those of short-term urban professionals, using the benchmark of five years to separate the two groups of people. However, the sampled urban professionals had lived in the downtown area for an average of 3.5 years (median of three years) at the time of the field research. Only three of the sampled urban professionals had lived in the area for five years or more, and I did not find any significant difference in perception between these three long-term residents and the larger group of short-term residents.

I coded the data once it was all collected. Coding is a process used in grounded theory which is a qualitative research method first developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. By using this method, one constantly compares quantifiably categorized, or *coded*, data with theory development (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Instead of only organizing data, this process focuses on organizing different ideas from the analyzed data (Strauss 1987). Coding is an “inductive yet reductive process” that helps a researcher develop theories (Walker and Myrick 2006). There are different types of coding, and two were used in this study. Open coding is the initial form of coding, where the researcher closely examines the details in the data, categorizing it and trying not to miss anything (Strauss 1987). Axial coding is done after open coding and initial theories or ideas are generated. When using axial coding, the researcher goes back through the data, focusing on one category at

a time, making connections between them (Strauss 1987). In this study, coding helped me theorize the perception of gentrification in downtown Kansas City by its residents. Using open coding initially, I organized interview data into four databases. The first included comments about noticed *changes* to downtown. The second included *positive* comments, or what residents liked about living downtown. The third included *negative* comments, or what residents disliked about downtown or what they think downtown needs to improve most. The last database was called *topics*, and it included issues that residents had neutral opinions about, or issues that were controversial and thus unable to be categorized as positive or negative. There was overlap between issues in all four databases. Using axial coding later, I reorganized the data based on different codes based on different elements of the landscape: the *aesthetic*, the *functional*, the *public*, the *authentic*, and the *human*.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

#### **The “Downtown Experience”**

When asked why they moved downtown, many of the interviewed urban professionals initially said that they worked downtown and wanted to live nearby. Upon deeper inquiry, many professionals revealed that another part of why they moved downtown was in search of the “downtown experience,” an idealized perception of what life in a downtown area should be like. This includes such things as being within walking-distance of work, services, and entertainment, being able to view an aesthetic urban landscape, and being able to encounter diversity, excitement, history, and authenticity. The homeless, on the other hand, generally lived downtown to be near available social services and had little conception of the downtown experience portrayed by the urban professionals. Downtown living for them was the daily grind, not an ideal landscape.

#### **Aesthetic Landscape**

Part of a resident’s downtown experience is the visible landscape itself. Many urban professionals had an idealized view of what the landscape should look like. One perception of the ideal urban landscape shared by many of the participants of this study is that a city should be beautiful. Beauty meant something different to different residents: to some it was landscaping, to others cleanliness, attractive buildings, graffiti, or picturesque views.

With the arrival of gentrifiers downtown, the city has made beautification a priority. Trees have been planted, planters with flowers have been installed, and streetlights have been updated, among other things. Certain streets and some entire districts, namely the Library and Power and Light Districts, have benefited from planned streetscapes. Kansas City's City Planning department and the Downtown Council's Community Improvement Districts are responsible for many of these improvements. There are two Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) downtown: one that functions within the loop, and another that covers the River District (Rowlands 2010). The Downtown CID Ambassadors, colloquially known as the "bumblebees" or "yellow jackets" due to the yellow clothing that they wear, maintain landscaping, clean up trash, and patrol public spaces (Rowlands 2010). The River Market CID Ambassadors perform similar jobs, but they wear red clothing instead of yellow. One city stakeholder, when asked about the biggest factor bringing new residents downtown, spoke about city beautification efforts:

*The work of the Community Improvement Districts is a large part of it. When the Downtown Council and the city first really set its sights on, "Now it's time to bring downtown back," the first thing, the first major initiative was Community Improvement Districts because we knew that if the streets weren't clean, and if there wasn't a feeling of safety and security, this would never work. So that was really the first initiative. And now that that's established, and now that we have new venues downtown, certainly like Power and Light and Sprint, it's just been kind of an*

*immediate turnaround. Now all of a sudden, this is the place where everything's happening. And people don't seem at all shy about taking part in it and enjoying it. ... There is just more happening. But again, without that feeling of safety and security and friendliness, this would, we wouldn't be building a solid future.*

This quotation shows the perception by city stakeholders that city cleanliness and feelings of safety and welcome are vital to the sustainability of downtown as a residential community. Also, there is a perception that cleanliness is a large part of how feelings of “safety and security” can be achieved. This last point is important and will be revisited in a later section.

City beautification efforts were recognized by some residents in this study, while other residents perceived a lack of city beautification in certain areas of downtown. Beautification was mentioned by twelve urban professionals and one homeless resident. Flowers and other “natural” elements were generally perceived as positive additions to the landscape. Eight participants took at least one photograph of a streetscape including natural elements. One young professional resident described how landscaping can affect one's sense of place:

*There's nothing more uninviting in my opinion than street pavement, a curb, a sidewalk, additional pavement. You really feel like you're kind of the “concrete jungle” mentality. It's amazing what a little bit of*

*landscaping can do to your sense of place. I know it sounds corny, but it's true. It's more inviting.*

Other streetscape elements such as matching light posts and benches were also perceived as positive. Another young professional attributed a sense of place in part to streetscape elements, specifically the landscaping and light posts:

*Participant: This [photograph] is kind of random and innocuous, but it's mostly just for this: the light post. 'Cause they were all changed within the last... this summer. I think all these have been changed. If you notice all of them, they all used to be just normal, iron, like silver-looking, ugly normal light posts.*

Interviewer: And now they're pretty?

*Participant: Yeah, and now they kind of... Just all the little things, like the parks and this, is just one example of making it kind of a nicer feeling instead of some industrial... And like the little sidewalks you see all the little planters and trees and all those sorts of things I think is a step in the right direction. ... Driving down here before, there were huge, huge steel plates that they would put over just holes in the road, and the majority of all those are gone. The streets are better. ... [And the new lamp posts] just kind of gives it a nicer feel. Kind of a more lively feel, which is essential. And I think these things are a nice touch compared to what used to be here. I mean, and it's nothing big. It's one of those things that you don't*



**Figure 1** *New streetscape elements near the Power and Light District.*



**Figure 2** *A recent Crossroads streetscape project includes new lighting and sidewalks.*

*really notice initially, but it's all those little things that just give the place a feeling.*

Residents who lived near recent streetscape projects or within one of the CIDs tended to have responses similar to the two presented here, but those who did not live near those projects tended to feel that more city beautification was needed. As the previous quotation indicates, some perceive that there have been improvements in the upkeep of aesthetics, that the “majority” of the steel plates that cover potholes in the road are “gone,” but not all residents saw it that way. Some mentioned how those steel plates were still a problem, how the new landscaping was unkempt, how there were trees missing from their tree wells, and other similar problems.

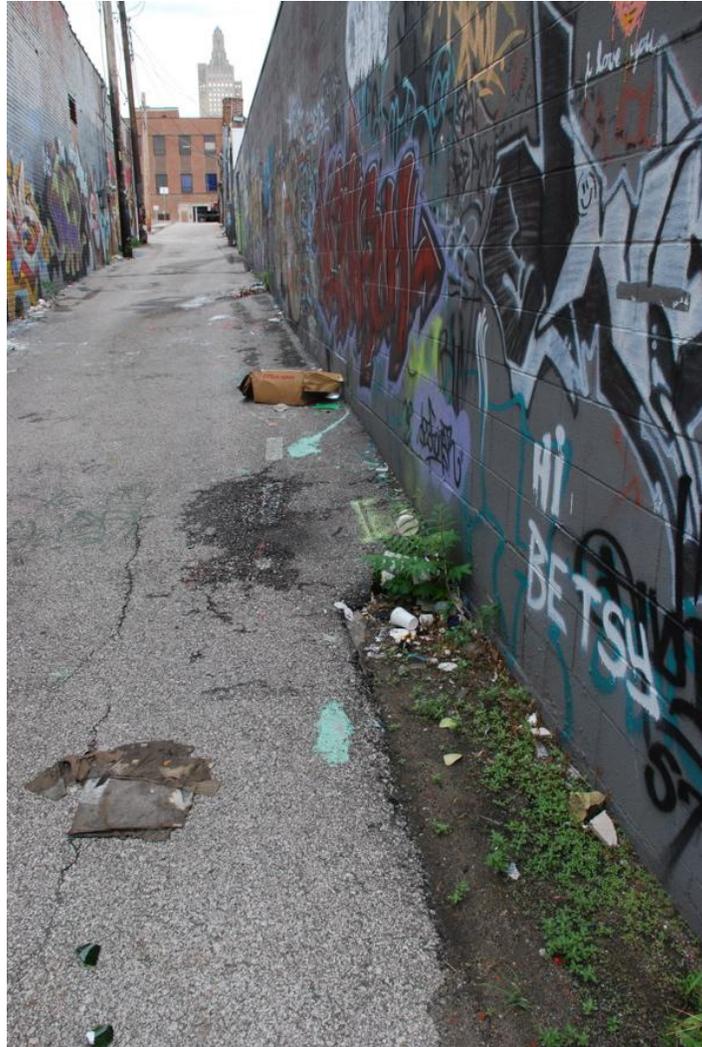


**Figure 3** *A tree well with a missing tree represents needed infrastructure improvements.*



**Figure 4** *This crumbling sidewalk represents deteriorating infrastructure across downtown.*

Trash was perceived as especially problematic in the Crossroads District. It is one of the largest districts downtown and has many new professional and “creative class” (Florida 2002) residents. There have been a handful of small streetscape projects there, but the district lacks a coherent cleanup system such as a CID. Two Crossroads residents spoke about the perceived trash problem in the district. One talked about how trash is especially a problem during monthly First Friday events, where visitors come from all



**Figure 5** *An urban professional took this photograph to represent the “trash problem” downtown.*

over the city to view the many art galleries characteristic of this “arts district”: “It’s trashy, especially after First Friday. It is so trashy. I mean, somebody does finally come around and clean up, but it’s not the same.” Another resident also spoke about the problem:

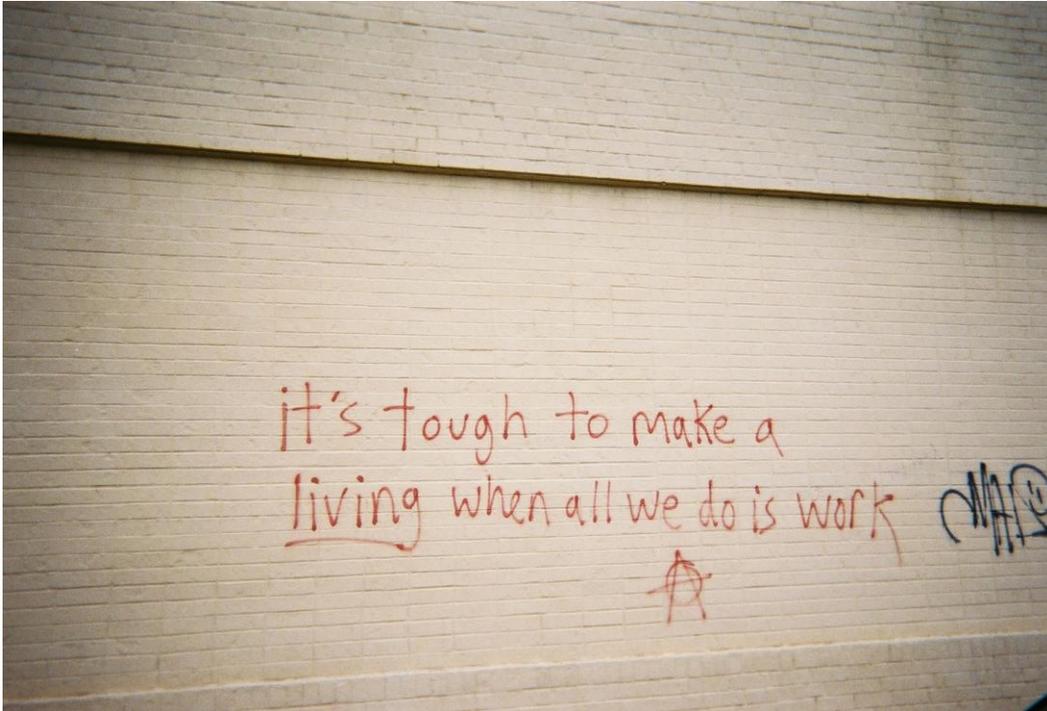
*Participant: Trash is a problem in the Crossroads. They have a group up in, they have a downtown group that funds people who go around and clean...*

Interviewer: The yellow jackets from the Community Improvement District?

*Participant: Yeah, and they have the red jackets down there [near the River Market]. But we don't have anybody in Crossroads, so we have a big trash problem.*

While streetscape projects and natural elements were generally seen as beautiful and trash was seen as ugly, alleyways and graffiti were seen as both; residents had varied perceptions of them. Five residents took photographs of alleyways and three took photographs of graffiti, though for different reasons. To some, alleys were dirty, unsafe places and graffiti was vandalism. To others, alleys were unique nooks and the graffiti that adorned them was art. Though these elements were not widely discussed and few concise quotations about them were found in the interview transcripts, they are important to note because beauty and the ideal landscape are varied among gentrifiers, as is supported by the postmodern framework used here. Instead of focusing on these differences, I will continue to generalize about shared perceptions.

Elements of the derelict landscape were generally perceived as negative; these included unsightly surface parking lots and vacant space, both empty lots and abandoned buildings. It has been shown in Vancouver that gentrifiers who consider themselves to be “urban pioneers” want to see land progress to its “best and highest use” (Blomley 2004).



**Figure 6** *This graffiti represents unique street art to the young professional who took the photograph.*

Gentrifiers can believe that as urban pioneers, they participate in improving the landscape, while property owners who leave lots vacant stagnate the city's constant march forward (Blomley 2004). When speaking about derelict elements on the landscape, the urban professionals interviewed for this study also expressed desire for better use of those spaces. Eleven urban professionals spoke about surface parking lots, and six took photographs of one. A typical response was, "On the east side, you know we just have these sprawling concrete parking lots that are just unused, and I'd like them to do something with that." And another:

*Surface parking, that's a big problem in Kansas City. And I just took this picture of this one to represent all of them. And um, it's just an eyesore.*

*And there should be a better way. I think it's a zoning problem, a leadership problem, and maybe a political problem too. I don't know how much power these owners of these parking lots have, but they seem to get away with a lot. They're just really badly done, and there's no landscaping, there's no, there are no walls around them, and they're done as cheaply as they possibly can do them. The asphalt, you know it gets really hot in the summer. Cars sit on there and they just bake. It's just terrible. And it makes the city look awful, I think.*

Referring to the property owners who keep parking lots as “getting away with a lot” shows that this resident perceives those type of people as uninvolved and not invested in making the city better. Another resident commented on parking lot owners’ lack of investment:

*What's the easiest way to hold property? Pave it. Put a sign out there and pay somebody to make sure people are paying for parking. There's no investment required. There's very little maintenance, little liability. And that was just the mentality of a lot of property owners downtown.*

The resident refers to these neglectful property owners in the past tense. This is because this resident is also a city stakeholder whose office enacted an ordinance requiring parking lot owners to incorporate landscaping into their lots. Active in the process of city

improvement, this resident is satisfied that parking lots will no longer be allowed to be ugly, and the march of progress will continue.

One area in particular was perceived as a success in transforming a derelict landscape into an attractive one through development: The Power and Light District. Prior to the investment in this district, the dominant features on the landscape were surface parking lots and buildings in various states of disrepair. Now, in addition to



**Figure 7** *Unsightly surface parking lots were commonly photographed by urban professionals.*

changes to the built environment, there are more pedestrians along with the improved infrastructure and landscaping. One city stakeholder described his opinion about aesthetic changes in the district:

*Power and Light and Sprint together have just been this remarkable tipping point for downtown exchanges. And part of what you have to consider with Power and Light was where it was built. I mean, this huge, expensive undertaking was an area of complete decay. ... That used to be nothing but massage parlors and adult bookstores, and just really seedy stuff. ... And it's transformed, not only the reality of downtown, but the perception of it. Power and Light's made a huge difference in people coming downtown, feeling comfortable, spending money, hanging out.*

Here is a typical response from a young professional about how the district has changed the landscape:

*This [photograph] is, obviously, Power and Light District with Sprint Center in the background. You had asked about things that have changed. This is, when I moved downtown, this was a parking lot, so it's changed a lot and continues to change. Even six or eight months ago, there was probably, I think there was one retail store down here, and now all the way down Main is full of stores. So it's continuing to change, continuing to get better, brings lots of people downtown.*

Other amenities important to the urban professional sense of place were picturesque views of the skyline. Most of these elements included landmark buildings, both new and old. Modern-looking buildings were perceived as exciting additions to the city, and old buildings were perceived as a connection to the city's history. Historic buildings will be discussed in-depth later, but they are also pertinent to the landscape aesthetic. Of the view from her apartment, a young professional said:

*This is a picture of our view. ... Yeah, I mean, it's, you know, what makes this place, what we like it so much for I guess, compared to other buildings is the floor to ceiling windows so you have, you know, spectacular views.*

The aesthetic landscape was important to gentrifiers. Most praised city beautification projects and the CIDs and expressed dislike for surface parking lots and vacant space. Development projects such as the Power and Light District were seen as positive improvements to the city's landscape.



**Figure 8** *A view of the skyline from the southern end of downtown.*

### **Functional, “Experienced” Landscape**

In addition to the aesthetic landscape, another part of a resident’s downtown experience is the functional landscape. Many urban professionals had an idealized view of how the landscape should be interacted with. They expressed that the city should be walkable and have functional public transportation, it should have accessible public services and places of consumption, such as retail stores and entertainment venues, and it should have ample public space.

### *Mobility*

Mobility was an important aspect of life downtown for the residents in this study. Walkability was important to urban professionals, and public transportation was

important to homeless residents and some urban professionals. The perception of various other transportation options varied more dramatically.

Walkability was perceived by urban professionals as important to life downtown. Many felt happy that they could “walk most places,” to get daily necessities and to work, and they appreciated available pedestrian infrastructure. Some felt that improvements were needed to increase walkability. Homeless participants were not concerned about walkability.

Ten urban professionals spoke positively about walking downtown, citing appreciation for such infrastructure as pedestrian bridges and enhanced crosswalk lights. Five took photographs of those elements. This resident expressed how important walkability is: “I’m an urbanite who does not drive. So, you know, this downtown thing is really important to me. What I like about the sky bridges is that they exist.” Other residents perceived that the city’s infrastructure for pedestrians is lacking. Five participants took photographs of pedestrian infrastructure that needs to be improved, such as crumbling walkways and obstructions on the sidewalks. When asked about what the city needs to change most, one resident said:

*Make it pedestrian-friendly. It’s amazing how many of the streetlights don’t have the pedestrian sign. So it’s not a pedestrian-friendly area at all. Well, it’s hit-and-miss. Some places are and some places aren’t, but they need to work on that.*



**Figure 9** *A broken signpost is hazardous to pedestrians.*

One resident was involved in improving walkability as a member of a neighborhood association by working with the city to get improved crosswalk lights installed. He suggested that the reason that the pedestrian infrastructure needs improvements is because the city is more focused on cars than on pedestrians:



**Figure 10** An urban professional took this photograph to represent the importance of pedestrian infrastructure

*The city's not really used to having people downtown. It's not really used to having a neighborhood that prefers walking to driving. I think it's very auto-centric. One of the things we did last year was fight to have the walk signal be automatic when the light changed. ... It's a change we were able to do. Now they're automatic. It kind of signals that there's a shift in perception that yes, pedestrians are important. That in downtown, maybe*

*it's more people-focused than car-focused. So that's changing and has more to go, but it's a good change.*

Other urban professionals expressed dissatisfaction with the connectivity of downtown for pedestrians. Many discussed how the highways function as barriers, cutting off some districts from others. Four residents took photographs of highways and overpasses.

One specific place where connectivity is a problem is along the southernmost section of the loop is the Power and Light Entertainment District, an area of new investment. The southern section of the loop of highways nearby acts as a wall to the district. It cuts the Power and Light District off from the Crossroads District, another



**Figure 11** *This highway acts as a barrier between the Loop and the Crossroads District.*

gentrifying area. There are pedestrian walkways over the highway, but these are daunting to cross. One resident explained his support for a proposed plan to put a lid on the depressed highway:

*This is an example of where the interstates, they were built right through downtown, and really kind of separated one part of downtown from the other. And we were just in Dallas, and they're putting a lid over their interstate, over the central expressway there, and they've talked about doing that here, putting in green space, so... it makes it much more friendly to people who aren't in cars. And I think this kind of thing reminds me, too, of the need for... redoing streets so they're completed. In other words, not just for cars. They're for pedestrians and bicyclists as well, and transit. Incorporate all those things in the streetscape. We badly need it. Badly.*

A non-resident city stakeholder also recognized the issue of connectivity in this area:

*A lot of people refer to that as a scar between the two districts. And we've worked a lot to create those new pedestrian walkways over the bridge that are wider. And a few years ago those were all like about eighteen inches wide. Now they're like six feet, the walkways. So that's better, but still it is pretty, it's a barrier between flow between Power and Light District and the Crossroads, and we very much would like to eliminate that.*

Despite some challenges to walkability, those residents who have been living downtown for a few years have noticed the increase in pedestrians that has come with the recent rise in population, especially young gentrifiers. In fact, more pedestrians was one of the most cited recent changes to downtown. The perception is that Kansas City is still a commuter-city, but that downtown is beginning to change into a vibrant urban core. This five-year resident said:

*Foot traffic is probably the most noticeable change. Due to the fact that I live so close, I walk every day, well especially to work, and it's amazing how many more people are just on the streets than what there were before. The weekends, it's interesting, it's uh, kind of a demographic shift. After*



**Figure 12** *A street gathering represents an increase in population and vibrancy downtown.*

*five and then on the weekends, you find a lot, obviously due to businesses being closed, it's a much younger, crowd than what you'd find, you know, Monday through Friday, nine to five.*

Though walkability was perceived as important by most residents, the state of other transportation options was varyingly perceived. Homeless residents were significantly more likely to ride the busses than urban professionals. Some urban professionals wanted a light rail system to be introduced. Most residents, urban professionals and homeless alike, thought that public transportation improvements were needed. Few photographs were taken of transportation elements though, besides the “unsightly” parking lot photos taken more for aesthetic reasons than functional reasons.

Bike infrastructure was perceived as lacking, but only by those few participants who bike. Four residents and one non-resident city stakeholder spoke about how more bike lanes were needed. None mentioned biking as a significant source of transportation; rather, biking was discussed as more of a leisure activity.

All but one urban professional used cars to get around. Many mentioned that they had reduced car usage since moving downtown because of public transportation options and walkability. Some couples only had one car between the two people. Some professionals used their cars reluctantly: “Only if I have to.” Others used them regularly, citing convenience.

The existing public transportation system was a polarizing topic among residents. At the time of this field work in summer 2010, the major public transportation system serving downtown was the Metro Bus system, which also operated the rapid transit Metro

Area Express (MAX) Buses. All homeless residents and about half of the urban professional residents said that they use the bus system.

Most homeless residents perceived the existing bus system to be a mediocre way of getting around, and that the system could be improved. Their most common complaints were that the busses were inconsistent, late, and slow. One said that they were “sometimey.” Another said, “Transportation is good so far. But you got sit there so long to get where you gotta go.” And another:

*That’s a bad thing. The Metro’s got to the point where they need more busses running to different areas. And a couple busses... I’m just gonna give you one scenario: The 47<sup>th</sup> street bus is always late, never on time, totally packed. You can’t sit down. They need to either put larger busses on there, or run some more busses on there. [The 27<sup>th</sup> street bus] okay. But you know, you’ve got some of these busses running Monday through Friday, but Saturday and Sunday there’s people that need to get down. They don’t run all weekend. So you might be stuck. There’s people that work weekends that can’t get around. I’d like to see an expansion on it. If they have to charge a little bit more money, so be it. ... But get us where we need to go, when we need to go.*

As this resident suggests, service is reduced on the weekends, which is a problem for those working in service industries that stay open on the weekends—low-income positions likely to be filled by residents who need the buses the most. Suggestions for bus

system improvements from residents in this category included: line expansion, more busses, and better efficiency. Two homeless residents took photographs of the downtown bus plaza.

Urban professionals had extremely varied opinions of the bus system. Statements about the busses ranged from “convenient,” “reliable,” and “timely,” to “could be better,” “not wonderful,” and “only convenient for people along the line,” to “I’ve never ridden it. I never would,” and “It feels dirty to me.” More detailed discussions revealed that many professionals feel that public transportation could be improved. Some reasons given for the system’s failings were that the city is too spread out for the bus system to be effective and that people are dependent on the convenient car infrastructure already in place. One young professional put it this way when asked if she used public transportation:



**Figure 13** *The urban professional who took this photograph of a bus shelter described it as “gross” and “dirty.”*

*I do not. I was an avid public transportation user in Chicago. But in Kansas City, my commute would probably be double if I took public transportation and to me that's ridiculous. You know, it exists, but it would take me longer to use it to get to work than it would not to. ... I think a better public transportation system would be fantastic. I don't know that it will ever fly in the metropolitan area because we are so spread out. There's so much sprawl that really, the only way to connect the communities is via the highway system or the road system.*

A proposed solution to the public transit problem is the introduction of a light rail system, a topic about which residents also had varying opinions. Eleven professional residents and two homeless residents made statements in support of light rail, but some of them were “unsure” about it, or thought it would be expensive. Here is one urban professional's supportive yet cautious response:

*We ought to have some kind of a starter system that just serves a small area to get people used to the idea of riding the streetcars or light rail or whatever you want to call it. Almost all of the plans that have come out ... most of them are too grandiose I think. It needs to be small. I don't know how you'd define small. It could even just be a downtown circulator thing that happens in other cities, and they just do a circle, like a small train set or something that could sort of feed people that work downtown getting around town. Connects the bus systems or whatever. ... But I think that's*

*where it has to start. It has to be a small, affordable piece that people can get used to and say, "This is pretty cool. I'd like it to go further." You know, and then build on it that way. I think that's the way a lot of cities start, with some kind of small starter line, and then they add.*

Others thought light rail was "not necessary." Similar to some opinions about the bus system, opinions about light rail showed the perception that Kansas City is too spread out and car-dependent for a cohesive transportation system to work:

*You know, Kansas City is so, I mean, there's so many decades of development that have gone into making this, like, a car-based city. And I think reversing that trend is necessary, but at the same time, it's more complicated of a challenge than I feel like I could really address, or like see a plan and be like, "Oh yeah, that's definitely going to work."*

A few residents, when talking about light rail, made comparisons between Kansas City and other cities, saying things like: "I'm mostly for it. Just 'cause I think it, it's one thing that big cities have that we don't, you know, that helps kind of push, you know, along that route." "That route" is attempting to put Kansas City on the global stage, making it into a "world city." "World city" has been defined in at multiple ways, one being "a high ranking in the world's urban hierarchy" (Doel and Hubbard 2002), and Friedmann (1986) suggests that one of the seven factors contributing to world-city status is transport infrastructure. Some residents seemed to want light rail in Kansas City more

because of its “cool” factor than for its practical value. One resident city-stakeholder understood this in reference to his neighbors:

*I think everybody wants light rail because it's “cool” and it's new, and all the major cities you read about doing cool things have it. I don't know if it's the answer for Kansas City necessarily, but our current transportation system isn't going to cut it. ... Public transportation is a lot of people paying a little bit, which creates a big pot. You know, it's kind of an economies of scale type thing. ... So, I don't know what those answers are, to be honest. ... I mean, is it the new shiny diamond, or is it, you know, the grain of structure that actually serves a purpose?*

This resident, along with many others, felt that public transportation needs improvement, but that there are many challenges associated with change that are not easily solved.

#### *Access and Consumption*

Increased access to services and retail were other aspects of the functional landscape that urban professionals perceived as a positive change to downtown. Downtown has gained a few clothing stores, a grocery store, specialty stores, entertainment venues, improved green space and a new public library in recent years, factors that residents perceived as improving the livability of downtown.

On the services side, both professionals and the homeless perceived the 2004 introduction of the Kansas City Public Library's new central branch as positive. Five



**Figure 14** *The public library (right) occupies an old bank building and has a modern parking garage (left) decorated with images of famous books. Many urban professionals made positive comments about streetscaping in the Library District.*

participants, including two homeless participants, took photographs of the building.

Urban professionals said things such as, “I go to the library a lot now,” and, “We stopped buying books!” about the new library. The homeless viewed it as a place to spend time, get out of the elements, and use services such as internet access.

One public service perceived to be lacking was the school system. Few participants mentioned the schools on their own during their interviews. This is not surprising considering that only one resident had young children. However, the schools were something I asked about because Kansas City School District has been plagued with consistently low achievement since the 1950s, when the city experienced massive white flight (Montgomery 2010). In recent years, the district has seen low funding, crumbling facilities, low enrollment, and many school closings (Montgomery 2010). One city

stakeholder said about the district, “Kansas City Missouri Public Schools, holy cow. I mean that is a train wreck that’s been going on for decades. I mean, it’s like generations of families have been affected by the decline of KC MO public schools.”

I then wondered if the condition of school system affected residents downtown. Most young professional residents felt that if they had children, the school system would force them to move to the suburbs, or they would try to get their children into a charter school, or if they could afford it, send their children to private school. One young professional said:

*If we had kids, we would have to make the choice between charter schools or private. I do not consider Kansas City Missouri Public Schools an option. And it kills me to say that. I think that’s really sad. Now as they rightsize, that may change and it might become a viable option, but I would do charter schools or private.*

Another had similar sentiments:

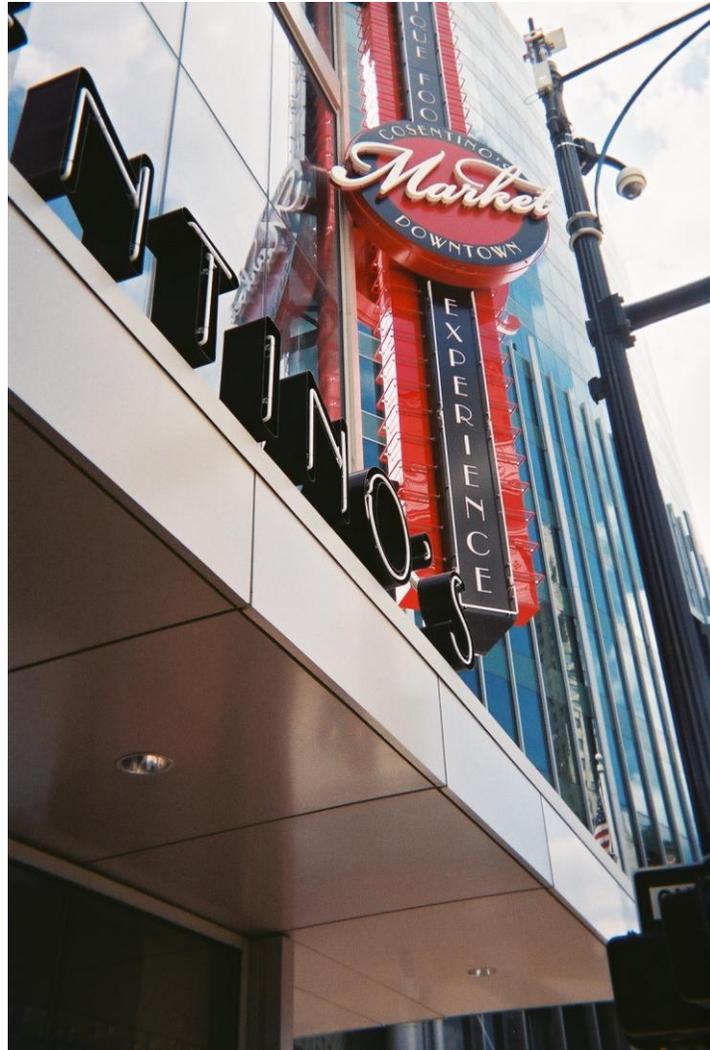
*The Kansas City schools are probably the biggest hurdle to attracting families downtown. There’s a lot of young people, single people, and a lot of kind of empty nesters who are here, but families downtown, they either have to send them to private school or, you know, they generally move when its time to send their kids to school.*

The only participant with young children recognized that he was an anomaly by planning to stay downtown with children, joking that he has three of the five children who live downtown. About his children's schooling, he said, "I'm looking at a charter school possibly, or even home-schooling is on the table." Overall, schools were perceived by urban professionals as barriers to attracting or holding on to families downtown.

On the retail side, places to shop were important to the livability of downtown in the opinion of urban professionals. The homeless, not surprisingly, were unconcerned about retail stores. One urban professional resident took a photograph of a wine store she regularly visits, and discussed the importance of retail:

*[This] is the Cellar Rat, which is a wine store that we frequent. And I'm struck with the fact that you can now buy groceries, buy wine, and buy, you know, clothing products downtown. ... And it certainly was that way, you know, a century ago with Harzfeld's and other businesses downtown. I think there was, like a, maybe a Macy's way back when. And my mom remembers as a kid getting dressed up and going downtown. But, growing up in the area, we never went downtown to shop or to buy wine or cheese or groceries or anything, so this is wonderful.*

One of the most important recent changes to downtown for its urban professional residents was the addition of a grocery store, Cosentino's Market at 13<sup>th</sup> and Main Street. Cosentino's was placed strategically in the heart of downtown near the intersection of the Power and Light, Convention, Financial, and Library Districts. Unlike the local grocery



**Figure 15** *Many urban professionals photographed Cosentino's Market.*

store chain's other stores around the Kansas City metropolitan area, this downtown store has a uniquely large prepared foods section and seating area, which caters to business people and convention attendees who want a quick lunch, and also to downtown residents who need a single-serving meal.

Before January of 2009, there was no such store in the entirety of downtown. Residents who lived downtown before that time said that they had to drive or take the bus out of the downtown area to locations such as Westport, Brookside, and Roeland Park to

buy groceries. The grocery stores in those areas are located anywhere from approximately four to six miles away from the new Cosentinos' downtown location.

Most residents expressed gratitude for the presence of the new grocery store. One resident said this about the importance of Cosentino's:

*I like having a grocery store now. I used to have to drive to Roeland Park, Kansas, was the closest, in terms of time. ... So I was driving to Kansas to buy my groceries. ... That's probably the most important change to downtown since I've been here. I can't emphasize how needed that was and how it totally surpassed everyone's expectations in terms of how it looks and how it functions and how it's used. ... It's the nicest grocery store I've ever seen. And going from nothing to that was great.*

Another said, "It's a great addition. I don't know if I'd still be here if that wasn't opening or with the hope of that opening." One of the interviewed non-resident city stakeholders said of the grocery store:

*Oh it's huge. You know, Cosentino's for the last few years before it opened was the number one amenity people were asking for in our research of what they need downtown. It has just been one of, it's kind of in a way like Power and Light. It's been a game-changer for downtown. And that store is so unique in the way they have so much of the store dedicated to foods that are ready, already prepared and ready to eat.*

Out of the twenty-five interviewed participants, seventeen spoke about Cosentino's, though it was a topic that I generally asked about if they did not mention it on their own. Five participants took photographs of the store. Though most of the comments about the grocery store were positive, some participants said that it was too expensive. Most of the homeless participants made no mention of the grocery store. One said that he uses it as a place to take his romantic dates to eat, but that he does not shop there otherwise.

In terms of entertainment, the most noticeable change to downtown's functional landscape has been the development of the Power and Light District. Because the area has changed so much, every interviewed participant had something to say about the new entertainment and shopping district, and fourteen took at least one photograph of something within the district. Urban professional residents generally had positive feelings about the Power and Light District because the development has brought more people downtown, but that they, as residents of downtown, did not patron the entertainment portion of the district often. Here is a typical response from a young professional:

*It's kind of a prepackaged area. You know it's, I probably prefer the, something a little more authentic, something a little more neighborhood-focused because I live here, but there's no question that it brings lots of people down here. There's way more activity. ... So the movie theater, and the Midland [Theater], and the Sprint Center, and all the events kind of brings life back to downtown. So that's a good change. There's people down here.*



**Figure 16** *This sign demarcates the corner of the Power and Light District.*

An important idea to glean from this quotation is the perception by this resident that the district lacks authenticity, a concept that applies mostly to the Kansas City Live! concentrated entertainment portion of the district. This concept will be discussed in a later section.

Another new entertainment venue that most residents perceived as good for the city was the Sprint Center Arena. Twelve participants mentioned the Sprint Center, and five took photographs of it. Two of the photographs and three of the comments came from the homeless group. They agreed with the professional residents that the arena was good for the city because it brings in people and money. Most of the professionals who spoke about the arena had been there for an event. This young professional expressed his enthusiasm about the area when he said, “I love the Sprint Center. I love college

basketball, so getting to see NCAA games in there is pretty cool. I would be ecstatic if they got an NBA team. We'll see what happens.”

Sports stadiums can make people feel as though their city is world-class or “major league” (Schimmel 2006). Just as urban professional residents wanted to see a light rail system in Kansas City, many wanted to see a professional basketball or hockey team call the Sprint Center Arena home so that the city would gain status and notoriety. Some hoped that a new baseball stadium would be built downtown, and were disappointed that the Kansas City Royals’ current home, Kauffman Stadium, which is far outside of downtown on the beltway, underwent a \$250 million update in 2009 (Kansas City Star 2009). When talking about the Sprint Center, this young professional mentioned his hope for a professional team:



**Figure 17** *The Sprint Center Arena is perceived as a positive addition to downtown’s entertainment landscape by urban professionals and the homeless alike.*

*Some people don't see the intangible benefit of having that because, there's things you just can't measure with folks' perception of Kansas City changing. If we ever get a professional team, just... it's sad to say, but like, people from outside of Kansas City don't think of Kansas City as anything. And we're almost identified by our sports teams, so that's why I was really pushing, hoping that the arena got built because if we get a basketball or hockey team, you know, a three sport town, I think that means something because that puts us... We're almost a third-tier city.*

A city stakeholder mentioned both a sports team and public transportation in his comparison to other cities:

*Cities that we compete with for entertainment revenue, they're all the same. People go get something to eat, they go to the game, and then they go for drinks. And hopefully they're using public transportation to get home. And that's, like, perfect downtown experience. We don't have that. We're missing two of those things. There's cool places to eat. There's fun bars. But, there's no entertainment venue that, you know, team-associated entertainment venue, and there's not reliable transportation.*

Access to services, goods, and entertainment was important to urban professionals. Most perceived the recent additions of a new library and grocery store to the landscape to be positive changes. They perceived a lack of acceptable educational

options downtown for their children, which is a potential barrier to downtown population sustainability. In terms of entertainment, new venues such as the Power and Light District and the Sprint Center Arena were perceived as positive additions to the city, but were perceived to be lacking in some way. The homeless were not concerned with consumption of goods or entertainment.

### *Public Space*

Much of the desired downtown experience exists within the public realm. The idea of “public space” dates back to the Greek *agora*, a marketplace where public affairs were conducted. Ideally, different people with different perspectives interact in the public realm, and all are welcome (Mitchell 1995). Every resident in this study mentioned an aspect of the public realm, including the aforementioned streets and sidewalks, but also green space and consumption spaces. One urban professional said of the public realm, “Street life is very important to me. The public domain is big, so a lot of the pictures that I took kind of are oriented around the public domain.”

Many participants discussed green space as a functional, public landscape element. All resident professionals seemed to value green space as intrinsically beneficial, but the perception of presence of green space varied by residential location. Among the homeless, green space was discussed as a functional place to spend time. All but three of the twenty-four interviewed participants spoke about green space. On the whole, more positive comments were made about the parks downtown than negative comments, and many participants made both positive and negative comments. Twenty

participants had something positive to say about a park while fifteen participants made a negative comment about a park.

Among professionals young and old, the attitude toward downtown's parks varied by the location of the residence. Those who lived on the north side of downtown, in the River and Columbus Park Districts tended to say positive things about parks, whereas residents of the districts within the loop had mixed opinions about parks. South of the loop in the Crossroads District, residents tended to have negative opinions of the available green space.

In the two districts north of the loop, River and Columbus Park, the large Richard L. Berkley Riverfront Park is within walking distance, and three other smaller parks can be found in the vicinity: Columbus Square, Garrison Square, and City Market Park. Of this arrangement, one resident summarized the prevailing feeling about the area by saying, "I think Kansas City has great green space." A Columbus Park resident had a more intimate sense of attachment:

*The next picture is near and dear to my heart. This is the actual park of Columbus Park, and it's so thrilling to me that there's this cute, cute, quaint little park right next to downtown. And this is where we walk our dog every day. There are bocce ball tournaments some weekends. It's super fun. And they've got, there's a group of kind of, I would describe them as young professionals that play about once a month, and you know, they've got 15, 20 people out there drinking beer on a Saturday playing bocce ball. And there's a pavilion where they sit and have lunch and*

*whatever. And it's just really charming. ... It's just a great park, and there are little, um, bags for your dog's business all over. And it's a well-loved park in the community. As you can see, I took lots of shots [of it].*

River District residents especially love Richard L. Berkley Riverfront Park. It spans seventeen acres along the Missouri River, and is the annual host of KCRiverFest, the downtown's Fourth of July festival. It is well-lit with functional park amenities, and offers unique features such as an amphitheater and a pedestrian bridge. Five residents said that they use Berkeley Park, and four took photographs of the space.

However, because the park is somewhat out of the way, and also out of view from most of downtown due to its low elevation along the river, it does not seem to be frequented by those who do not live nearby. One resident explained a picture he took of Berkeley Park:

*This is a good one because it shows that there is, there's green space down here. It's a very urban area but there is green space. But, Berkeley Park is kind of known for being underutilized, so not a lot of people in this picture. You know, it was a beautiful day, but there weren't, other than our little barbeque, there weren't a lot of people out using the park. There's been some new improvements. They're trying to change that. The port authority down there, they put in a new trail and some other new amenities down there. They've got plans to do more stuff, so it's kind of a mix of good things and bad things all together in that picture.*



**Figure 18** *Columbus Square is beloved by Columbus Park residents. The fire hydrant is painted red, white, and green to represent Columbus Park's Italian heritage.*



**Figure 19** *Berkeley Riverfront Park has lighting elements that are old-fashioned, giving the park a historic aesthetic prized by gentrifiers.*

While northern downtown residents described having ample green space and possibly underutilizing it, the residents of the southern Crossroads District on the opposite end of downtown reported a lack of access to green space. There are no parks in the Crossroads district. Although some parks can be found in nearby areas, they are perceived as being too distant or inaccessible for Crossroads residents; in addition, the parks are cut off geographically by major transportation corridors—highways and railroad tracks. A Crossroads resident took this photograph of the closest green space to his residence:



**Figure 20**

He said, “So this like 20 by 15 triangle is what passes for green space in the Crossroads. And we just need more of that.” Another resident explained that he had wanted to live in the Crossroads District, but because of its lack of parks decided to move to the River District instead.

A small variety of parks exists in the center of downtown within the Loop. On the westernmost edge in the Quality Hill District is the relatively large Ermine Case Jr. Park, which seemingly is mostly used only by nearby residents. There is little commercial activity near the park, so it is not frequented by workers during the day. Only two interviewed residents mentioned Case Park, and three residents took photographs of it.

Conversely, a much smaller park within the Loop seems to be used much more frequently during the daytime by people who work nearby. Oppenstein is a pocket park taking up only a quarter of one city block. It is located near the intersection of the Financial, Power and Light, and Convention Districts. Even though it is one of the smallest official parks downtown, it is one of the most functional because of its location. Four residents said that they use the park. One of the interviews conducted for this study took place at this park because it was right outside the interviewee's office. The young professional claimed to eat lunch there when the weather was nice, and others appeared to be doing just that as we spoke.

Another park within the Loop, Ilus W. Davis Park, spans two blocks between the Federal Courthouse and City Hall in the Government District. The park has few residents living nearby, and it is highly manicured with monumental statues, sculptures and fountains. But it lacks the coziness that a soft path or a winding stream can bring to a park. As a relatively new park, the trees are still short and provide little shade. The three residents who mentioned Davis Park said that the park has few visitors and that it does not feel welcoming. One resident described it like this: "Between the courthouses there's that [park], but that's not really a, it almost feels too manufactured, like you're not



**Figure 21** *Ilus W. Davis Park sits between the Federal Courthouse (background) and City Hall (not pictured).*

supposed to be on it.” Another resident talked about the park’s general lack of people, but also noted that it has seen more use recently:

*Ilus Davis Park ... is a pretty dead park. But one thing, and I don’t know who came up with this, Parks Department or what have you, but Thursdays ... they now have a farmers’ market there as well, which has really helped. You know, there’s people that now play soccer there on*

*Tuesday nights. So there are some things, and I think that as the residential area around the park grows, it will be much more than it is now.*

In the interviews, the downtown residents talked most often about rooftop parks. Eight young professionals mentioned either the Power and Light Rooftop Park or the Kansas City Public Library Rooftop Terrace, both of which are in the Loop. Rooftop parks are new to Kansas City, so residents in this study saw them as exciting places to be. The parks are seen as unique to downtown, making them part of the unique downtown experience that new residents hope to have by moving there.



**Figure 22** *Urban professionals perceive the Power and Light Rooftop Park as a unique green space.*

Overall, the perception of green space among downtown professionals is regionalized: the northern part and the farthest southern boundary of downtown have sufficient parks, but the central and southern areas of downtown need improvement in green space. A River District resident described this regionalized perception of green space value well when he said:

*[Berkley Park] is an awesome green space, and it's kind of for the northern half of the city. I know, like downtown if you get a little farther south there are some green spaces, like around Liberty Memorial and whatever that whole area is. This is kind of another addition to that, 'cause there's nothing really in the heart of the city. Between the River Market and, really, Crown Center there's no... unless I'm missing something.*

City stakeholders are aware of this perception. All four interviewed mentioned that many people feel that certain areas of downtown lack green space. Some were hopeful about a plan in the works at the time of the field work to put a lid on the southern portion of the Loop's highways to create a large central park on top, which would also increase connectivity between the Crossroads District and the districts within the Loop. The two non-resident city stakeholders spoke about the city's completed efforts to improve green space downtown by mentioning Oppenstein Park's 2008 renovation, and one specifically focused on the transformation of its feel:

*Before we put all the effort into, kind of reclaiming that park, it was not a nice place to be. It was very much a homeless hangout. A lot of bad things going down there. And it was a kind of place you wouldn't feel comfortable walking through. And now it's just a complete difference.*

Also evident in his quotation is the city's attitude toward homeless in the parks. This city stakeholder associates the "homeless" in the parks with immorality, the "bad things going down." Yet the homeless participants spoke about the parks as places where they often spend time. Most of the parks that the homeless mentioned are on the east side of the downtown Loop in the Paseo West District, which is the district where many of the homeless services are provided. None said that they spend a lot of time in the more centrally located downtown parks. Two homeless residents said that the police remove the homeless from those parks.

Although the ideal public space includes all of the public, public space is often exclusionary (Mitchell 1995). So while homeless people spend most of their time in public spaces, they are often excluded as members of *the public* by other citizens (Mitchell 1995). In the spirit of revanchism, policies are developed to sanitize public space of undesirable homeless people, and according to the homeless in this study, these policies are actively being enforced in Kansas City parks (Davis 1990; Mitchell 1997).

Besides feeling unwelcome in these green spaces, homeless residents otherwise spoke positively about parks. Most were supportive of the city's cleanup some of the parks downtown. One park in the Paseo West District had recently been given a facelift. The fountain was redone, and now people are free to go wading or swimming in it. One



**Figure 23** *The Women's Leadership Fountain in the Paseo West District is a frequent hangout for the homeless.*

homeless resident said, "I find solace there." These homeless residents claim that another park, nicknamed "Jurassic Park," had previously been full of drug dealers and drug users. One said, "You'd sit there at night, it looked like lighting bugs with so many lighters lighting." But now, the park has cameras installed, which has been an effective deterrent for drug users. Instead, these residents see kids playing there now. The homeless' support of surveillance in the parks is somewhat surprising given its use on them, but it seems that these residents made a distinction between the morally good (cleaning and reducing drug-use in the parks) and the bad (arbitrarily kicking out the homeless).

Besides feeling unwelcome and sometimes disrespected in public parks, many homeless residents portrayed feelings of disrespect when it came to public services available to them. Most of them told me about two or three places that they receive

services regularly. Many mentioned the Grand Avenue Temple as an important place for them to get both physical and spiritual services, which is unsurprising considering the fact that I recruited the homeless participants from this church. Other important places for these residents included ReStart, Hope Faith Ministries, and City Union Mission, places that offer shelter, food, health care, and job resources. Although the residents were appreciative of these services, most of them wanted to see an increase in the availability and quality of the services. Some were unhappy with the quality of the overnight shelters, complaining of bedbugs in the cots, limited freedom because of the early-evening time required to get there in order to get a bed, and general loss of dignity caused by having to use the shelter. One participant said, “The shelters are like prisons.”



**Figure 24** *ReStart provides shelter and supportive services to the homeless.*



**Figure 25** *The homeless frequently spend time near entrance to the Grand Avenue Temple.*

ReStart, Hope Faith Ministries, and City Union Mission are all located on the east side of downtown in the Paseo West District. The Grand Avenue Temple is located nearby on the north side of the Financial District. These places that provide services for the homeless are generally not near hotels, points of interest, or entertainment venues. One resident said about the area near the Grand Avenue Temple, “They call this “the stroll” because a lot of the homeless people, you know, they all make rounds during the day period around in this particular area.”

Not all homeless services are located on the east or north sides of downtown, though. Catholic Charities and Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral are both located on the east side of the loop in the Quality Hill District. Grace and Holy Trinity used to host Kansas City Community Kitchen that serves meals to the needy. At the time the

interviews were conducted, the kitchen was still located at Grace and Holy Trinity, but was about to move into a new facility in the Paseo West District in September of 2010 (Batten 2010). The new facility is larger, has new equipment, and is closer to other frequently used services for the homeless. One city stakeholder praised the move as a service to the homeless:

*We realized that all of the homeless shelters, the overnight shelters in downtown Kansas City are real close to 8<sup>th</sup> and Paseo. The problem is that the only community kitchen to service them was like at 13<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, so it's like, they have to walk there and back. It's like a three and a half mile walk every day to do that. So the Downtown Council does work with the Episcopal community services to build a new kitchen in the basement of the Restart center at 8<sup>th</sup> and Paseo. So starting in September, that long trek through downtown goes away.*

However, some of the homeless residents were not happy about the impending change. They felt that because the kitchen was directly across town from many other homeless services, the city officials did not want the users of these services walking back and forth through the city's newly invested-in areas like the Power and Light District every day. About the kitchen's move, one homeless resident said this:

*Some of this stuff just irks me and pisses me off is that the city doesn't care, they don't care about us down here. When you take a place like*

*Broadway, that church over there where they feed you dinner, and move them, make them move over there off of Paseo just so we don't walk through downtown in the middle of the daytime with backpacks and all that to go over there... there's something wrong with the city. I mean, we're not that bad. ... That walk, that downtown time, is some of our "me" time, you know, to get away from the things that has brought us down here or is causing us to stay down here. You know what I'm saying? But they don't understand that. People don't understand something that they didn't do. The homeless always like that.*

When I mentioned how the homeless felt that the kitchen's move was to make them less visible, the same city stakeholder who praised it as a positive service to the homeless said:

*Oh, I'd be kidding you if I didn't tell you that was part of the reason. I mean, we're motivated to clean up downtown, and to make people healthy, and to make people feel safe, and all that. That was clearly not a healthy situation for anybody. ... There's no doubt about that. We're trying to help the people in the community do a better job [by helping build the new kitchen]. But by doing that, it will also help us not have as many homeless people walking the streets through downtown where we're trying to develop a better experience for visitors and residents.*

In a revanchist city, the homeless are often used as scapegoats for the ills of society, and other members of the community are afraid of them (Smith 1996, 2001). Among urban professionals, this fear was reflected in their mental geography of downtown. When I asked them if there was anywhere they or their female family members felt unsafe, they generally said eastward (where most of the homeless services are), southwestward (a predominantly Latino neighborhood), certain areas of the Crossroads District (where there is no CID), or other places perceived as homeless hangouts.

The most often-perceived “unsafe” place was eastward (the Paseo West and 18<sup>th</sup> & Vine Districts, and the eastern sides of the loop and the Crossroads District); ten professionals mentioned it. Regarding where he feels unsafe, a young professional said, “Probably east of McGee.” Another young professional replied, “I wouldn’t go east.” An older professional said:

*This neighborhood I live in, I really like. But, if you go a little bit east, there’s four facilities for the homeless and really poor people, and that makes a huge difference. You know, those people have all the rights in the world, but they can be tough. And it’s a little threatening sometimes.*

Professionals also avoided homeless hangouts, though the perception of what constituted a homeless hangout varied. One was near Grand Avenue Temple, where I recruited homeless participants. A young professional said, “On Grand, there’s a lot of homeless people.” An older professional couple said:

*Participant 1: We avoid going on Grand, north on Grand. That can be rough. You see some strange characters. We had a strange experience one day.*

*Participant 2: Some people have approached us pretty aggressively.*

Some perceived highway bridges and overpasses as unsafe. One professional said, “I don’t like walking across the interstate. That’s kind of a dead zone, and that’s where, I think, homeless people kind of hang out anyway.” Others cited certain empty lots or stores. This older professional described being heckled by homeless near a liquor store:

*It used to be scary by Grand Slam Liquors. ... Grand Slam Liquors was odd because if you walk on fourth street east, they have empty lots with a few trees and billboards. And so a lot of times the homeless and poor people would go to Grand Slam Liquor, buy their liquor, go sit in those shady trees and behind those billboards and drink. And if you were walking right in front of them, you became entertainment for them. You know? And I got a lot of like, “Hey pops, where you going?”*

In general, places that have seen recent development and the two areas with CIDs were perceived as safe. And residents who have lived downtown for a few years or more felt that downtown was getting safer. A young professional said about safety downtown, “I noticed in the last year I see girls jogging on the street, riding their bike.”

The homeless, in contrast, felt unsafe and unwelcome in those areas. Besides keeping the streets, sidewalks, and landscaping clean and maintained, as was discussed in terms of the aesthetic landscape, another goal of the CIDs is to keep them safe (Rowlands 2010). “Safety Ambassadors” patrol the streets and parking lots. While the city does not explicitly state that the CID aims to remove homeless people, it is perceived to be the case by some of the homeless participants in this study. City and police homeless removal policies also were perceived to be on the rise. One said:

*Participant: And a lot of places that you go to that you, you know you're not welcome. They know you're not welcome, and they insist that you know that you're not welcome. You know what I'm sayin'?*

Interviewer: What places in particular do you feel really unwelcome?

*Participant: Well, for instance, the Power & Light District. Pretty much a lot of restaurants, the finer restaurants and the better places that they call [inaudible] around here, the key areas. You know, there's certain things that, for some reason, they can automatically look at you and say, 'Well, 'cause you's homeless...' And they go out the way to make you know that you're not welcome in being there. That's not something... You know I, to be truthful about it, the only time that you even welcome in the city facilities down here is when they wanna, when they wanna arrest you and put you in jail...*

Another had a similar perception:

*We cannot stay, we can't go downtown like we used to. If we get caught downtown after a certain time, police start arresting you. Bike police are the worst ones. ... Since they built up the new areas, they puttin' out the bike police. ... They got a squad. I think it's six to twelve of them. They control the downtown area.*

A homeless resident spoke about feeling pushed out of downtown:

*But it's the idea that the homeless really, a lot of them have nowhere to go and the city is pushing them out of downtown. They want everything east of Harrison, east of Troost. ... The construction is definitely chasing the homeless out of Kansas City. There's no doubt about it. When Mayor Kay Barnes, when she was there, made a push to get everybody out of downtown, the homeless out of downtown. Had a bounty on 'em. ... There's just, there's nowhere to go. They're pushing them into a corner. Pretty soon they're going to strike back.*

The tension between the homeless and the state felt almost violent to this particular resident, which suggests a downtown Kansas City that has turned into a revanchist city battleground (Smith 1996). But the city stakeholders claim to see it another way. One said, "Some cities, they take a far more brutal way. It's all about police and running

people on streets. And that's not what we're trying to do. We really want to help those that need help."

Some urban professionals noticed that there had been a reduction in the number of homeless people in central downtown. One said, "It seems like there hasn't been as many homeless people lately!" And another, "I know that there has been a push by some downtown groups to make them less visible."

I asked the urban professionals about their interaction with the homeless. Most perceived the homeless to be part of the downtown landscape. Though they felt unsafe in the perceived homeless hangouts, the urban professionals claimed to otherwise feel unthreatened or only mildly threatened by them. One said, "Homeless people don't typically intimidate me, scare me. I mean, for the most part, they're harmless." Another said similarly, "They don't really bother you. Sometimes they'll ask for something. And I've only had one time where they, like, got mad when you didn't give 'em something."

Many residents discussed another kind of public space: Kansas City Live! Within the Power and Light District, this is a section dedicated to entertainment. It covers an entire square block and consists of a covered outdoor plaza with a stage surrounded by two stories of restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. The Kansas City Live! stage and plaza host regular concerts and events, and appears to function as a public space. The plaza is free to enter on most nights unless there is a special event such as a concert. As previously mentioned, many urban professionals felt that the Power and Light District was good for the city, but that they did not patron the Kansas City Live! entertainment section and its public space often. Homeless participants generally did not express satisfaction with the area but focused instead on their feeling unwelcome there.



**Figure 26** *The Kansas City Live! entertainment area in the Power and Light District has an open plaza surrounded by bars and restaurants.*

Some urban professionals liked the Kansas City Live! open plaza, while others avoided the area entirely. One of the few urban professionals who liked the area thought of it as a community hub:

*I was here for the World Cup whenever 10,000 people were there. There for the Big Twelve tournament, lots of people. Seen music there. I've just hung out there and had a beer. It's a great gathering place that didn't exist just a few years ago. And you think, "Where's a community focal gathering point, you know, before this?" Maybe Liberty Memorial lawn or something, but this has created a space for people that wasn't there before, and some really neat things have happened there.*



**Figure 27** *The Kansas City Live! plaza was full of people during a World Cup watch party.*

Another who liked the public space recognized that others did not:

*I do however, (and my husband and I don't agree on this) I like this public space. I think that there is something to having an event and a lot of people watching. I think that screen's too small. But, I like the space. And I like that businesses open out onto it. I like the feel of it. I think it could be utilized more. But I think that that will happen.*

Ideally, the space is supposed to be open to all, but some community members argue that it is not truly public space because not everyone is welcome there. The primary reason behind this argument is the dress code that is enforced within the space of Kansas

City Live! The dress code has been a controversial issue at the Power and Light District since it opened. The company that runs the entertainment district bans items such as work boots, white t-shirts, and baggy pants (Horsley and Campbell 2009). Locals have protested that the dress code is racist because it targets black males, and a number of discrimination lawsuits have been brought against the district's developer (Horsley and Campbell 2009). One African-American participant said of the Power and Light District, "It was built for white people."

Black males are not the only ones who feel unwelcome at the entertainment district because of the dress code. Regardless of skin color, the homeless are also excluded. A white homeless participant had this to say about the dress code:

*I don't think it's right, you shouldn't be able to pick out a certain section of town and say, "You can't wear t-shirts there. Girls can't wear tank tops there."... It's like, "It's a street, you mean I can't walk down the street with a t-shirt on? It's a hundred degrees outside!"*

A female homeless resident said:

*Participant: If any of our homeless people get caught in that area after certain hours they go to jail.*

Interviewer: Just for being there?

*Participant: Yes. If they get caught in front of that building, they going to jail. They can't even go down there and buy a beer. If you ain't got the*

*right clothes on... I can't go in there like this. They'll say that you got to have at least slacks on, or you can't wear sandals. You got to wear pretty shoes. Different stuff. You got to be dressed. You can't wear short sleeves. They don't care. All they want is money.*

Simply put, the homeless find that the dress code is not only exclusionary but also confusing. They do not know specifically what articles of clothing are actually banned, but the very presence of the dress code makes them feel unwelcome at Kansas City Live! In their perception, enforcement of the dress code is up to the identification checkers each night, so it is inconsistent. The enforcers get to subjectively decide who is welcome and who is not, so the homeless participants in this study are seemingly justified in their perceptions of arbitrary exclusion based on looks.

Most participants were aware of the dress code because it has been controversial and highlighted in the local media. Yet many of the urban professionals interviewed, residents to whom the dress code probably would not apply, were reluctant to talk about it. Only one young professional spoke about it at length, and his explanation of the public/private space balance through comparison to the public library is exemplary:

*Participant: The city needs more, kind of communal spaces. By that I mean places where you can go, no matter who you are, and you're not pressured to buy things. Like, I think the biggest failure of the Power and Light District is the, like, sort of like police state. You know, like...*

Interviewer: The dress code?

*Participant: Right, yeah. Quote unquote “dress code.” You know, I feel like that is, it’s so disappointing because this is something that, you know, as taxpayers in the city, we all made an investment in, and in that same way, like, we are all kind of complicit, you know, in like what goes on there. And I think that was really disappointing because one of the things I love about the library is that it’s supported by taxpayer dollars, at least to a certain extent, and it’s like the, it’s a place where, that’s one of the only places you can go in the city where you’re gonna see people who normally wouldn’t share the same, like, fifty-block radius, let alone the same fifteen feet, you know? And that’s what I see every time I go to the library, you know? It’s great. ... And I think that that’s so important. It’s something that a city like Kansas City needs so much. Just to kind of break through this really entrenched kind of ideology, this sort of “us versus them” thing. ... In the library, they have security guards who go around and, you know, kind of check on, you know people who are sleeping or whatever. ... And, like I’ve never seen them mistreat anybody. But there’s a different kind of surveillance environment in the Power and Light District. And maybe it’s because that space is in this kind of like panopticon, sort of like, you know like, there’s the balcony around it, and you’re all just kind of peering down into like this fish tank sort of thing, um, that makes it feel less inviting. You know, I haven’t seen bums hanging out at the Power and Light District. I don’t think you’re gonna see that anytime soon.*

This resident expressed feeling uncomfortable at the entertainment district, even though he is a college-educated, white, young professional. Also, note that he, like many other residents discussed this issue using the name “Power and Light” to mean the Kansas City Live! portion, even though the dress code does not apply to other Power and Light District businesses or spaces.

The dress code was a big issue in 2008, the first full year the district was open, but by the time of the interviews for this project in the summer of 2010, enforcement of the dress code had dropped and the issue received less attention from the media. When I asked a city stakeholder about the dress code, he spoke about it in the past tense, but also defended it:

*If you went out and bought a new car, would you want a bunch of kids with baseball bats running around it? Probably not. ‘Cause it’s gonna get scratched and it’s gonna get dented. I think that’s the nature of whatever is new. Anytime you have public funds, ... those are city-obligated bonds. That’s [our] tax money. And so I think that there is a certain element, in my opinion, that requires service to all regardless of color, race, creed, what you’re wearing. I get that. But at the same time, you have to be practical about it and understand that if that fails, we fail because the investment we have in it. And I don’t think it’s going to fail. ... And, you know, if you want to get into the, “Was the dress code racist?” or whatever, I don’t know. I never observed anything that I can say was racist or, “We don’t want this type of person.” I think what they were*

*trying to do, at least in my, from my optimistic viewpoint, is, they were trying to maximize their revenue. And, you know, from a marketing standpoint, I can't blame 'em. But from a "and justice for all" standpoint, maybe they did, you know, do some things they shouldn't have done.*

### **Authenticity and the Historic Landscape**

As discussed in Chapter 2, authenticity is often an important ideal to gentrifiers (Zukin 2010). In downtown Kansas City, the new Power and Light District was perceived as inauthentic by urban professionals. In contrast, "historic" places were considered to be authentic. Homeless residents were not concerned about authenticity.

#### *The Inauthentic Power and Light District*

As previously mentioned, most residents do not visit Power and Light's entertainment district Kansas City Live! often, because it is perceived as expensive, kitschy, and corporate. The residents I interviewed were much more interested in visiting so-called local establishments. Yet, as these two young professionals describe, there is a widely-shared opinion that the new businesses bring people, money, and vibrancy to downtown. One said, "I'm happy it's there. The Power & Light is like a liquor playground, so I don't go there a whole lot. But I'm happy it's there. It's good for downtown." The other said, "It's not really my crowd. It's not my scene. But that's not to say that I don't like it being there, you know? I do like that it is a kind of energizing area of the city. It does bring people into the city. It's just not my scene."

Many residents made comments pointing to their perception of the area's inauthentic feel. Some explained that it feels more like a tourist attraction than a functional community hub. Many interviewees shared the idea from a young professional that "They didn't make it for me." Instead, participants believed that the district's main goal was to attract out-of-town tourists and Kansas City suburbanites. One resident city stakeholder disapproved of the fact that it was built by a non-local developer and is frequented by patrons from Johnson County, a wealthy suburb:

*You know at first, I was really hesitant to embrace Power and Light, 'cause it was kind of, you know, it was people from out of town, coming in making rules in my neighborhood kind of thing. And there is a lot of that. There is a certain Johnson County contingent that drives me crazy down there, 'cause it's like it's New Year's Eve for them every time they come down. It's the new, shiny toy to play with. And I'd rather hang out at my neighborhood bar and know my bartender and know who's coming in the door, and that's just part of my personality. I'm not 22 anymore. ... I mean, let's cut through all the haze. That's not for the downtown resident. It's great to have it so close. I mean, I'm glad it's here ... but it's for the out-of-town resident for their "downtown experience."*

Two residents actually compared the area to specific well-known tourist attractions: "Those bars, they're so expensive. It's like Disneyland," and, "It's kind of a

circus. It's got a circus feel down there." Another resident spoke about it as a spectacle to be viewed, but not participated in:

*Yeah, I like to walk around Power and Light every once in a while. I really do feel like it's like, the greatest, most terrifying art installation project ever, you know? But as like a place to go and like, I don't know, I'm not really interested in it for the purposes for which it was created, you know? I only find it kind of incidentally fascinating. ... There are things about it that, again, just the way it's constructed, I think are kind of interesting, but I do hate everything it stands for. ... It's fun to walk around there when there's tons of people and families and like, the guy with the microphone and speaker, like talking about judgment day and stuff, you know? It can be kind of like a fun, if you just want to be in a crowd, you know.*

The residents' perceptions of the Sprint Center were starkly different from their perceptions of Kansas City Live!, though both are part of the same space, the Power and Light District. At the Sprint Center, downtown residents feel welcome. The perception is that whereas the Sprint Center is meant to be a tourist destination where one is meant to watch a spectacle, the Kansas City Live! entertainment plaza functions similarly without meaning to do so.

*Historic Places*

Historic places were important to most of the interviewed urban professional residents. Eighteen of them mentioned at least one “historic” building that they liked, and some spoke at length about their support of historic preservation. Homeless residents, however, made few comments about historic preservation.

Historic preservation refers to the act of preserving historical buildings or artifacts, and is “the modern way of maintaining living contact with cultural works of the



**Figure 28** *The Mainstreet Theater has been renovated and now hosts a modern movie theater.*



**Figure 29** *The Midland Theater was recently renovated.*

past” (Philippot 1972). Historic preservation is often seen in areas of gentrification, as gentrifiers search for authenticity in their new neighborhoods (Barthel 1989). In this process of historic preservation, selection of items, places, or landmarks to be preserved is subjective, so the resulting landscape is a partial representation of the past, and it also represents the values of those in the present who participate in historic preservation (Barthel 1989; Dwyer and Alderman 2008). In this way, historic preservation can help define the identity of a city.

Among participants of this study, renovated or repurposed buildings were especially celebrated. The Mainstreet Theater was mentioned by seven participants, and eight took photographs of it. The theater was built in 1921. It was renovated as part of the new Power and Light District, re-opening in 2009. Today it hosts an AMC movie theater.

Six participants mentioned the nearby Midland Theater, and five took photographs of it. Built in 1927, it has been used at a movie theater, but has functioned as a performance theater for many years. This theater was also recently renovated and re-opened in 2008.

Many participants spoke about the aforementioned Kansas City Public Library as well. In 2004, the library moved into the renovated former First National Bank building, built in 1906. The building's transformation from private, corporate space to public space open to all was perceived as unique.

Many urban professional residents expressed frustration toward the practice of tearing down old buildings to replace them with surface parking lots. One said, "It's bad to see the buildings go down. It's even worse when it's [then] just left vacant. It just kind of leaves scars on the neighborhood." As previously discussed, surface parking lots were perceived as unsightly.

Again, vacant space was also perceived as ugly. Five participants spoke about recently demolished buildings, and some about their hopes for better use of those spaces. Some were passionate about saving old buildings and fixing them up for new purposes. One young professional expressed this sentiment well by saying, "I would much rather see an old brick building refurbished or retrofitted as opposed to demolished."



**Figure 30** *Urban professionals expressed disappointment at missed historic preservation opportunities such as this one.*

The two homeless residents who spoke about vacant or demolished buildings specifically indicated that they hoped those buildings could be used for housing. Regarding housing, one said, “There’s just not enough. And I see places around here that they could use to do that, but they just tear them down. I guess the land’s worth more than the people.” This resident’s comment is somewhat ironic, since downtown has gained at least 5,000 new housing units in the past decade (Collison 2010a). However, much of the new housing are lofts and condos rather than low-income or public housing.

The urban professional residents were less specific about how the buildings should be repurposed. A typical attitude toward the reuse of old buildings was expressed in this way:

*The city has a lot of parking lots where there used to be interesting buildings. ... It may have not been significant architecturally, but it's a connection to the past. That's really important to me, if you find ways to use those buildings.*

Like this resident, many urban professionals felt a connection to the city's history through its "historic" buildings. In many cases however, the residents did not necessarily know why a building was historic; they just wanted to save the buildings anyway. As a young professional put it:

*A few months ago, this was a row of old town homes, which was torn down and now it's a gravel lot. ... We're just hemorrhaging historic buildings all over the place. Just this year, I think we had two, or I guess, there's one over on Baltimore right now I took a picture of that's getting ready to be torn down. Possibly it's on the historic register. And another one that was like an opera house from the early 1900s was torn down this year. There's some other buildings, pictures of those, that are being torn down. So, we're tearing down a lot of historic buildings. And the reason people live downtown, the reason downtown is exciting and interesting is 'cause it has that historic, architectural heritage that, you know, it's kind of, there's a lot of... The suburbs have a lot of competitive advantages compared to downtown, but one of the competitive advantages that*

*downtown has is that interesting urban environment, and so we're kind of destroying it as we try and improve it.*

This resident did not know the names or histories of the buildings that he heralded, yet they were a significant part of his connection to his neighborhood. His perception was that one of the major draws for people to live downtown was the presence of these historic spaces.

During the period of time that these interviews were conducted, a public historic preservation struggle was ongoing over the Cosby Hotel, an abandoned building in the Library District built in 1881 (Planning KC 2010). The city deemed the building to be dangerous and ordered an emergency demolition (KCTV5 2010). A few residents mentioned the hotel, and four took photographs of it. A grassroots movement to save the Cosby Hotel from demolition employed community support on the internet, through outlets like blogs and social networks. The public's cry to save it paid off, and the building was not demolished (Kendall 2010). The preservation of this building is an example of the influence that gentrifiers in have on the shape of the downtown landscape.

During the fight to save the hotel, one resident relayed his knowledge of the situation:

*This is a national historic registry building that the neighborhood association is trying to prevent from being torn down. It has an emergency demolition order on it. And the owner kind of let it deteriorate through neglect over a period of a decade or more. And it's cheaper to tear down*



**Figure 31** *Urban professionals photographed the Cosby Hotel to represent historic preservation efforts in the community.*

*than to stabilize, so he wants to tear it down, but once it's down, besides that there's a surface lot, I think it's from the 1890s, you know or something like that, and we don't have many of those left. And once it's gone, you can't replace it. This whole stretch of Ninth is kind of, a very historic feel to it. It kind of feels like historic downtown there. And this would kind of just rip a hole right in the middle of that. And it's kind of the immediate-term safety and economic issues versus, you know, having a neighborhood that's actually viable in the long-term.*

This young professional felt that historic preservation was essential to neighborhood sustainability over time. This quotation is similar to the prior one, with the idea being that

downtown draws people because of its historic value, but that much of Kansas City's history is being "lost" to the wrecking ball and to surface parking lots. Yet the Cosby Hotel was allowed to stay, offering hope for the preservation of other historic buildings. Another resident said, "What was it? The Crosby, Cosby? The Crosby Hotel. That was pretty cool. ... That was like one small victory in a long line of defeat."

One historic place in particular contributed to many professional residents' sense of place and connection to the community, and it typified the kind of authenticity those residents looked for within their downtown experience. The City Market was by far the most talked-about historic place among participants. Sixteen participants mentioned it and eight took photographs. The City Market consists of an open-air, public space that hosts a farmers' market on Wednesdays and weekends. The open space is surrounded



**Figure 32** *The City Market is appreciated by urban professionals as truly public space.*

with a mix of permanent-structure businesses, including restaurants, bars, photography studios, antique shops, flower shops, clothing stores, and a museum. It resides in the River Market neighborhood, also known as the River District, which is the location of Kansas City's founding. The City Market was built and has been in use since 1857. Through the years, it has undergone multiple renovations, with a major redevelopment in the late-1980s that cost \$14.5 million of both public and private funds (Copaken-Brooks 2011a).

Because the City Market is structured similarly to the Kansas City Live! area of the Power and Light District, comparisons can be drawn between the two places. Both consist of public space surrounded by businesses. Both hold concerts and events in the central open space. Both have been developed in part by public funds. Yet residents' attitudes toward the two are almost opposite. While Kansas City Live! is perceived as inauthentic and corporate, City Market is perceived as authentic and local.

The City Market is viewed as open and welcoming to all. It is frequently visited by families with children because it has family-friendly activities such as the farmer's market and the Steamboat Arabia Museum. The only resident participant with young children said of the City Market, "On Saturdays its fun. I take the kids down there, chase them around. Shop."

Other residents appreciated that the City Market attracted a diverse mix of people. This resident city stakeholder described it like this:

*So one of my favorite public places in town is the City Market. One, because you have a lot of people. There's a lot of different things that you*



**Figure 33** *The City Market hosts a farmers' market.*



**Figure 34** *The public plaza at City Market is perceived by urban professionals as "local" and "diverse."*

*can do. It appeals to, you know, people that want lots of different kinds of food, the whole local thing. ... You've got families, singles, all different age groups, ethnicities. I love that.*

Notably, this resident appreciated the open space within the City Market as truly *public* space, welcoming to all types of people. In contrast, as discussed in a prior section, the Kansas City Live! “public” space is unwelcoming to certain groups due to its dress code.

In addition to functioning as a public space, the City Market has a structure that fosters interaction. It has small, densely packed vendors, so patrons can wander from stall to stall. Absent is the unsocial individualistic feel of suburban shopping malls. This young professional spoke about both the City Market’s diverse patrons and how the market feels like a densely populated, social urban environment:

*The other thing about City Market, too, it's like, honestly, it's like the one place downtown where you feel like you're in an urban environment.*

*'Cause on the streets, I mean like, you look right now, I don't even see a single person walking down the street, you know? Oh, there's one guy.*

*And so, and that, like on the weekends, it's like you get the pulse of the city being down there. It's kind of people from all over.*

This resident lives in the financial district, where density decreases after the workday is over. To her and other downtown residents, the City Market is part of their idea of an

authentic downtown experience that is defined by pedestrians, interactions in the street, and diversity.

Besides representing diversity, the City Market also represents the place for residents to support local businesses. The marketing tagline for the City Market is, “Where the locals go” (Copaken-Brooks 2011b). The tagline proves true, as the majority of residents in this study visit the market, and many of those mentioned specific local businesses that they patronize in or near the City Market. As this resident city stakeholder describes, the market seems to have developed organically, thereby proving its authenticity:

*You want to talk about a very organic... I mean, there is not, those businesses are not benefiting from incentives. I mean, the market itself is, but, like, Harry's and those types of establishments, those are born on the back of the entrepreneur. There's no city incentive that is keeping their doors open, which is pretty cool.*

Besides the City Market, other local businesses across downtown were photographed and mentioned by urban professionals. These places were also prized for their perceived authenticity.



**Figure 35** *This collection of local shops in the Crossroads District was described by the photographer as “unique.”*

### *Authentic Neighborhoods*

Urban professionals also sought authenticity in entire neighborhoods. In general, they sought a utopian urban village with “mixed-use business, housing, and leisure spaces” (MacLeod and Ward 2002). The utopian neighborhood ideal varied from resident to resident. Some residents favored Columbus Park, the West Side, or the River District; all three were perceived to be mixed-use/residential areas with ethnically diverse populations. Others thought the perceived diversity of the central business district was ideal. One resident talked about how the West Side felt “organic” and mixed:

*I really like this aspect of downtown. There’s little, Westside Local here, Bluebird, kind of very local, quirky little places mixed right in with the*

*neighborhood. It's a great place to walk around. Nice old homes. There's a lot more to do here now than there was just a few years ago, but it was done in a really good way. It's all kind of organic. They didn't, like, tear down a block of houses to do it so it all fits together. So it's kind of the same feel that it used to be, but better 'cause there's more to do and see. There's some very modern homes on the Westside and some very, very old homes, and they kind of all go together, so I like it.*

This resident also noted how the recent development in the area seemed to fit well with the existing structures. Even though modern homes were built, they were done in this area house-by-house by individual gentrifiers or small-scale developers (traditional urban pioneers), avoiding a corporate feel. A Columbus Park resident gushed about a local establishment called Happy Gillis that has branded itself as a “café and hangout”: “It’s just a great, old-fashioned neighborhood joint like they used to have in these small urban neighborhoods. The corner store, the corner deli, and it just pleases me to know that it’s a block away from my house.”

Diversity is an important neighborhood quality for gentrifiers, contributing to their sense of place (Ley 1996; Lees et al. 2008). However, middle-class values are also important (Ley 1996). In downtown Kansas City, urban professionals sought diversity. One young professional compared the ethnic makeup of downtown to the suburbs:



**Figure 36** *Happy Gillis is a beloved local hangout in Columbus Park.*

*I grew up in the suburbs, and that's not what I want. It's just an experience that, I'd rather have my kids grow up in a multicultural, diverse area. ... The liveliness of [downtown], I think is probably the most, is the piece that keeps me down here the most. Seeing something new and different most every day. I mean, I don't want to make it sound like I walk out my door and I'm in New York City. That's not it. But if you live in a cul-de-sac [in the suburbs] ... If someone comes in your cul-de-sac that doesn't live there, you're wondering why they're there. I have no reason to question why someone's walking down the street.*

This resident is typical in desiring neighborhood *ethnic* diversity; but as I discussed in terms of attitudes toward the homeless, urban professionals did not desire neighborhood *economic* diversity.

### **Residents' Self Perceptions**

I have discussed how the professional residents perceived others in terms of diversity and attitudes toward the homeless, and how the homeless residents perceived the gentrifiers and the city officials. But the residents also had perceptions of their own role in the community. The urban professionals saw themselves as urban pioneers whose residence downtown helped improve the landscape. Homeless residents tried to fit into the gentrifying landscape by separating themselves from other, disgraceful homeless.

The conception of the gentrifier as emancipator and urban pioneer is widely held (Smith 1996; Lees 2000). Many of the urban professionals in downtown Kansas City saw themselves as urban pioneers, improving the landscape and leading the way for urban revitalization. They felt a connection to other pioneers, sometimes referring to other residents and the city decision-makers as “we.” Even though this young professional resident did not work for the city, he took ownership of the recent developments: “Even though we spent a lot of money on the renewal, we’ve still got a long way to go.” Another young professional not associated with the development took ownership and provided opinions about future development: “I think we need to work on strengthening the core of the downtown area before we expanded out to the riverfront.”

Some professional residents tended to associate so much with the urban pioneer metaphor that they hinted at superiority over suburbanites or lesser-adapted residents.

When talking about the typical suburban Power and Light District patrons, one young professional said:

*There's nothing more frustrating than when I'm out walking my dog on a Saturday evening and there's a group of twenty-somethings, loud, obnoxious, drunk, falling all over themselves, but you take the good with the bad. It's no different than the crackhead at six o'clock in the morning talking to herself. I mean, it's just part of the fabric of a downtown environment. I kind of like it.*

This resident showed how well-adapted he was to the urban landscape by tolerating and even embracing the suburban other, but also the “crackheads.” An older professional showed off his supposed adaptability by saying, “I don't think enough people in Kansas City really know how to be urban dwellers. ... I think you have to know how to live with people.”

When I asked them about the geography of their social circle, though, many of them admitted that most of their friends were still living in the suburbs. A young professional claimed that most of her friends lived in the suburbs, but that she is beginning to make friends downtown:

*Participant: Growing up here, a lot of my friends live in the 'burbs and have not lived outside of Kansas City ... so they pretty much stayed where they grew up, in the 'burbs, predominantly on the Kansas side.*

Interviewer: So you guys are kind of the...?

*Participant: Yeah, the urban pioneers I guess. But then, yeah we're making friends in our neighborhood, so that's been nice and a lot of fun.*

Another made similar comments and suggested that her friends do not come visit her downtown often:

*We certainly made friends down here, but I would say the draw is from the old neighborhood, old friends. And that is one of the drawbacks. You know, people don't come downtown a lot. It's just, there's something about it that people are hesitant, so I usually go out to them. ... It's not that far at all. But I sense it with my friends and stuff. I would say parking is probably a major reason. They say, 'Where am I gonna park. I'll have to park a long ways away and walk.'*

The homeless also attempted to separate themselves from a particular group of people: certain homeless individuals. They categorized some behaviors as “bad”—drunkenness, drug use, panhandling, not looking for work, and carrying around bags. All of these behaviors were not in the “bad” category for all residents interviewed. Panhandling and carrying bags were acceptable behaviors for some, but drunkenness and drug use were mostly unacceptable. No matter how each participant classified good and bad behavior though, most of them had a conception of the wrong type of homeless

person – the type of homeless person they assured me that they were not. One homeless resident said:

*We're not all the same down here. I'm not like that one guy that sits across the street and drinks all day that goes in the shelter at night. I try to get out and find work every day. I don't even drink. But I'm just saying, they stereotype us all down here, and we're not all the same. ... And I'm gonna be honest with you, we bring a lot of grief on ourselves down here. The way they do, they panhandle, and they beg, and you know, if somebody doesn't want to give them something they cuss them out. There's no sense in that. It makes it hard on people that need help. They can't get help.*

Another tried to distinguish himself from those homeless people he deemed to be lazy by saying:

*I don't really, I don't make it a point to devote my life to relying on places to care for me whenever I'm still capable of gettin' out and doing something, even if it's collecting aluminum cans. I've still got a little bit of dignity. I mean, a lot of guys, they don't. That's just their life. They'll go from the homeless shelter to another place to another place and back to the shelter and all day long they don't do nothing. Might come down to the library and hang out, not even read a book. They just sit there holding up*

*a computer not doing nothing. You know, it's like, "C'mon man. You're better than this. You need to get up and do something."*

By making these distinctions, these residents were attempting to fit into the new, exclusionary landscape.

Urban professionals and homeless residents have a place in the gentrifying landscape. Urban professionals are consumers of the landscape, consuming aesthetics, services, goods, entertainment, history, and authenticity. They perceive the landscape to be emancipatory. The homeless are warriors, attempting to hold their place on the revanchist front. Both groups are important to the process of gentrification in downtown Kansas City.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

In much of the literature on emancipatory gentrification, gentrifiers are described as pioneers who aim to improve the landscape. Many of the gentrifiers in this study ascribe to this metaphor, some even referring to themselves as urban pioneers. Many of the gentrifiers, however, do not actively participate in changing the built environment. A few have bought old homes to fix up themselves, an activity typical of a conventional pioneer gentrifier. A few others are involved in historic preservation or community improvement groups. By contrast, the Kansas City gentrifiers interviewed in this study generally perceived themselves as more passive urban pioneers than the traditional type.

Kansas City urban professionals view themselves as pioneers, experiencing this identity through the sacrifices and daily experiences that derive from living in the downtown environment. In this car-dependent urban region, sacrificing the space of a large suburban home and the convenience of a car to live downtown is described as pioneer behavior. Instead of actively improving the built environment, the way these pioneers improve or emancipate the landscape is simply by being there. By choosing to purchase or rent property downtown, these residents consume and pay taxes in the area, therefore supporting its gentrification. These residents also function as passive agents of gentrification by increasing the population and vibrancy of the area. In traditional gentrification, gentrifiers displace poor residents, but Kansas City gentrifiers perceive that they are occupying underutilized or vacant spaces. Their perception is based in reality, since new developments such as the Power and Light District sit where there used

to be parking lots, and some lofts in the Crossroads and River Districts occupy formerly vacant buildings.

Although some sacrifice is required to live downtown, gentrifiers expect those sacrifices to be validated or made “worth it” by the amenities that living there provides. This study shows that for urban professional gentrifiers, there is an idealized perception of what living downtown should entail. In this vision, a professional resident should have the “downtown experience,” which includes an aesthetically pleasing, functional, and authentic landscape. These gentrifiers also desire a shared sense of place, one where gentrifiers are pioneers together, part of a hip, return-to-the-city movement. These elements of the downtown experience are pull factors for gentrifiers, and therefore the residents seeking them could be considered amenity migrants similar to those who are moving to rural areas of the United States.

The role of government financial investment influences the perceptions of gentrifiers. In Kansas City, the city has already provided many amenities to gentrifiers designed in advance to attract this population; these include improved streetscapes and green space and public/private development projects such as the Power and Light District. Gentrifiers feel that by living downtown they are supporting the city’s investments, thereby making them worthwhile. The dominant perception is that living downtown is good for the city. In interviews, gentrifiers even claimed ownership of city improvement projects by using the pronoun “we” to describe them. (Conversely, when the city is perceived to be failing at its job, the pronoun “they” was used.) This perception exists despite the fact that few gentrifiers directly support such provided amenities as the Power and Light District, eschewing them for being too corporate and inauthentic.

Authenticity is important to gentrifiers. In this study, urban professionals indicated that they like “authentic” places, although the definition of authenticity varies, as was discussed in the results. Despite this diversity, authenticity gives gentrifiers a certain feeling of belonging or sense of place, and is mainly derived from two elements of the urban landscape: history and diversity. Old buildings in particular contribute to gentrifiers sense of place, especially when the buildings have been repurposed, such as the Midland and AMC Mainstreet Theaters, the Public Library, and the City Market. Long-standing businesses are also important to gentrifiers, particularly if they are perceived to be local. By using, consuming, and otherwise participating in these buildings and businesses, gentrifiers feel connected to Kansas City’s history. Actual history is not important in many instances; instead, a historic façade built in recent decades can play the same role as an old building in creating a perceived historic atmosphere. The *aesthetics* of history are central to this gentrified sense of place.

Diversity also contributes to a gentrifier’s perception of urban space, although the “diversity” in this case is distinctively ethnic in character. Gentrifiers like the sense of place they find in mixed-use ethnic enclave urban village neighborhoods like the West Side and Columbus Park. They enjoy local businesses, where seemingly everyone is welcome, yet nonetheless there is a culture of exclusion that exists at such local businesses. Many of these institutions cater directly to middle-class gentrifiers, excluding the poor both openly through dress codes and indirectly via high prices. Gentrifiers want to encounter ethnic difference in their daily lives from a distance, and generally want their actual interactions to be with other gentrifiers who share middle-class values. While some gentrifiers view the homeless and the poor to be part of the fabric of downtown,

few actually interact with those individuals, whereas others avoid the poor entirely.

Kansas City gentrifiers hope to leave the land of sterile White suburbs behind, but do not want to discard the class values and behaviors found there.

If urban living in Kansas City fails to live up to the ideal downtown experience, or if the pull factors of the suburbs seem more attractive than staying downtown, professionals have been quick to move back out of the area. In this study, gentrifiers identified education and childcare (along with child-friendly amenities such as green space and parks) as the primary (and vital) services missing in the environs. Secondary amenities absent in the area were elements that would contribute to the “cool factor” of downtown: improved public transportation such as a light rail system or a professional sports team. Although many professional residents indicated a desire to see long-term population retention, not all seemed fully committed to living downtown if they had children or their financial situation changed. Many are still drawn to the suburbs because their social circles still exist there.

For the homeless in this study, the gentrification of downtown means less respect for them. They feel that changes downtown create a hostile environment, which is exemplified by the dress code at the Power and Light District. The city is cast as the enemy in a process of revanchist policing and efforts to make the homeless less visible, including the relocation of the Kansas City Community Kitchen. In general, the homeless do not perceive the gentrifiers as enemies. Instead, the homeless try to demonstrate good behavior—abstaining from panhandling or getting drunk—to prove their status as respectable citizens, too. Trying to “fit in” with the gentrifiers is their way of dealing with the threat of gentrification.

Although never directly mentioned by the homeless, authenticity does mean something in this social group. Those interviewed did not perceive authenticity through things, places, or history. To them, authenticity lies within the people of downtown. Homeless who do not publicly disgrace themselves or give a bad name to other homeless are authentic. Working professionals who help the homeless or simply do not disrespect them are authentic as well. City officials or disrespecting policy-enforcers are described as inauthentic.

This research is a fine-grained qualitative study of perceptions of gentrification in downtown Kansas City. Although the sample of thirty residents could be considered small, the methodological approach did not warrant a large sample. The data in a photo-novella study is rich due to its use of both photographs and interviews through a long-term research process through which the investigator comes to understand at least some part of the participants' lifeworld. The data is valid because each photograph and interview transcript represents the genuine perceptions of a resident at one particular moment in time, and understanding perception is the goal of this research.

While conducting this research, I encountered positive and negative aspects of the photo novella method. On the positive side, the photographs were excellent discussion facilitation tools. In many cases, one photograph represented more than one topic or perception, so discussions were rich. On the negative side, I found participants' photograph sets to be incomplete. I have estimated that participants only dedicated about one hour each to taking photographs for this project, which was generally not enough time to shoot all of the subjects that they wanted. Many participants commented that they would have taken a photograph of more things if they had found the time to do so. Others

commented that they forgot to bring the camera or it was too bulky to bring every day. Taking photographs of human subjects also presents an ethical issue, and participants were shy to do so. Because of this, I found the interviews to be much more representational of perceptions than the photographs.

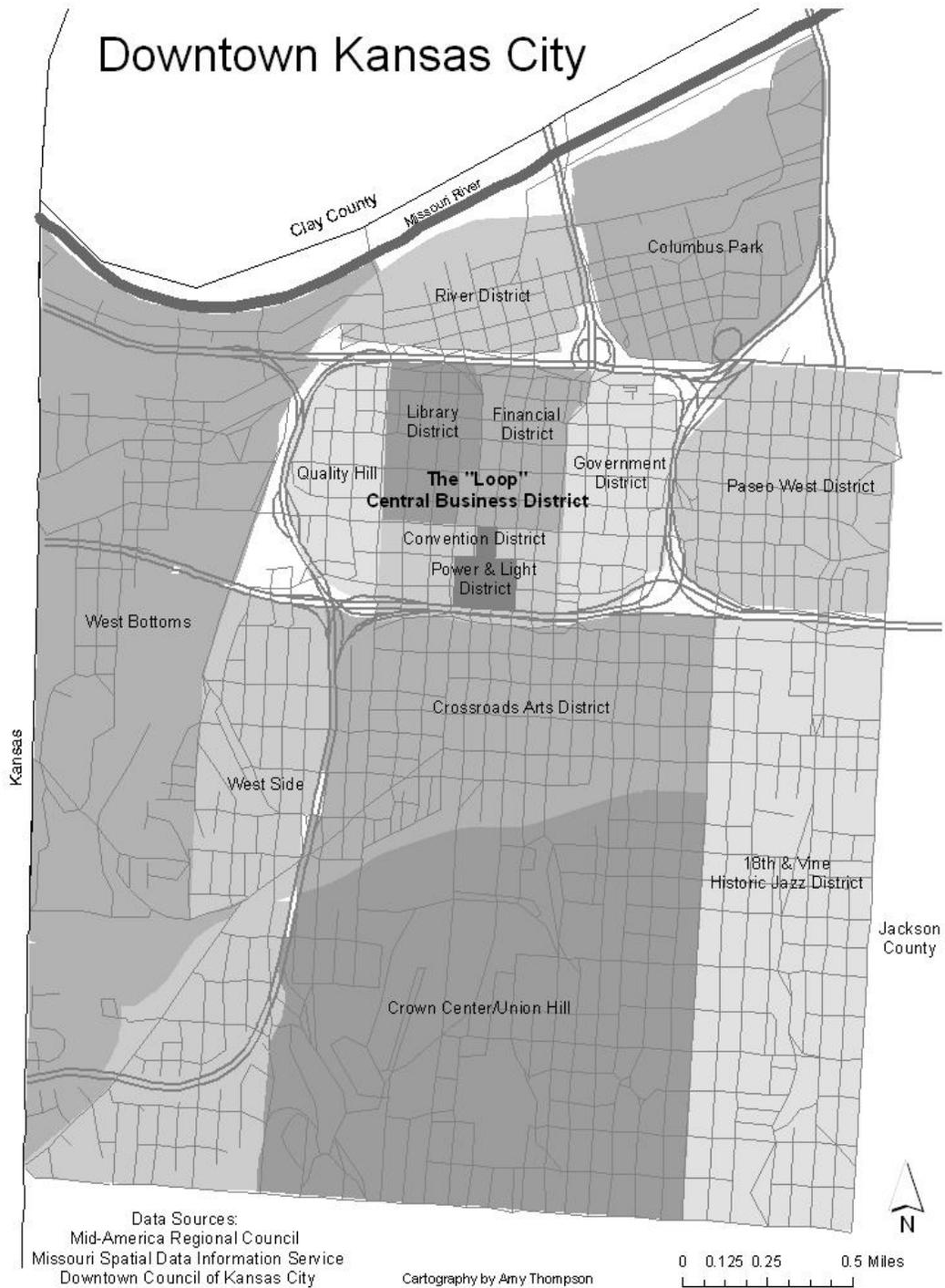
To make this methodology more convenient for participants, I recommend the use of digital or cell phone cameras if appropriate. That way, participants would be more likely to have the ability to take a photograph when it occurs to them, rather than having to make a point to remember the photograph subject and come back later with a single-use camera. Exclusion should be considered if digital cameras are an option, though. In this particular study, digital cameras would not be appropriate because the homeless most likely did not have access to a digital camera. If the homeless were given a digital camera for the project, they might be made a target for theft.

This thesis presents an exploratory study of residents' perceptions of gentrification in downtown Kansas City. Future research could be conducted with a larger sample size to create a more in-depth understanding of perceptions of gentrification. For example, the results show that perceptions of gentrification are regionalized, especially perceptions of green space, safety, and cleanliness, depending on the respondent's location. Perhaps this is because this sample is distributed across downtown's different neighborhoods. A concentrated sample from each specific neighborhood could yield more precise results. However, the results presented here are valuable because they add knowledge to our understanding of how gentrification is perceived across downtown rather than in one neighborhood.

For Kansas City, these results are important because the city has invested time and money into its downtown revival. It should therefore be aware of how its residents are interacting with and reacting to the changing environment. These results help city officials and other interested parties recognize the factors and amenities that attract new residents downtown, as well as those that are needed for long-term population sustainability. The results also help the city understand how the changes affect the homeless. City officials might be able to address the needs of all of downtown's residents better with this knowledge.

These results are also valuable in the context of other medium-sized cities, particularly in the Midwest where urban expansion occurred largely in the automobile-driven postwar period. Kansas City's brand of gentrification, in short, is not the traditional gentrification described in the literature. Population increase and new building are major factors in Kansas City's gentrification. Peer cities with small downtown populations who are trying to revive their inner city probably face disinvestment and similar transportation issues because of car-dependency. Gentrification trajectory is likely to be more similar to downtown Kansas City's than a larger city with traditional gentrification.

APPENDIX



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