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Constructing Community: An Exhibition of the Voices of Goodloetown

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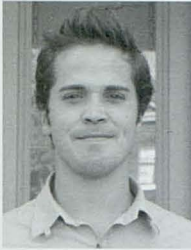
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I am a graduating architecture major in the College of Design. I am a senior Gaines Fellow, the 2004-2005 Clay Lancaster Scholar, and the recipient of the Dean's Prize for Architecture in the College of Design. I have spent two summers working as a studio assistant to architect and professor Maria Dellerba Ricci at the Institute University of Architecture in Venice, Italy. I am currently investigating resources to raise money for fabrication and presentation in hopes of constructing this exhibit later this year. I am currently applying for graduate school for a masters degree in architectural design. After the completion of this exhibit, I will be interning in New York until graduate school begins in the fall of 2006.

The most valuable experience throughout this project has been spending time in the Goodloe community: spending time with Rev. Wilson at his daycare, hanging out at Smoots's Garage, becoming a member of the Faith Center Baptist Church, tutoring inner city kids for the Phillips Memorial After-School Program, and collecting oral histories from Goodloe community members. Working with Dr. Wallis Miller, my thesis chair and academic mentor, has been an absolute pleasure. Dr. Miller is a constant source of inspiration; her intellect ignites a fire of investigation and contemplation. This project would not exist without her support, guidance, and assistance. The entire exhibit is online at www.uky.edu/kaleidoscope/fall2005.

Constructing Community: An Exhibition of the Voices of Goodloetown

This project presents four distinct voices of a Lexington community through the physical manifestation of an exhibition. The voices, consisting of maps, scholars, the press, and local residents, will be extracted and displayed as separate entities. It will be the role of the audience to put the abstracted pieces back together and to construct Goodloetown as a community. The humanities moves forward from feelings that are universally human and understands their meaning through investigation expressed through the arts. By specifically addressing two areas of social activity within Goodloe, the church and the garage, the project documents a fraction of the incredible wealth of humanity found in Goodloetown today. Although this incredibly vibrant community survives in the shadow of Thoroughbred Park despite an historic lack of attention from the surrounding city, it is now in danger of being displaced and ultimately destroyed.

Throughout my education as an architect, the sculptural qualities of forms, forms connection to history, and how particular forms interact within a physical context, have been at the core of my investigation. My experience with the complex component of social interaction in relation to the built environment had, prior to this project, been limited to architectural theories and individual concerns. Examples of these concerns addressed how particular spaces affect behavior: how they encourage (or inhibit) contemplation and self-reflection or how they serve to bring people together or force them apart. Through this project I have been witness to, and at times participated in, the dynamic social structures that encompass the Goodloe community. Unlike my past architectural exercises, this thesis represents a broader, more accurate depiction of community: rather than focusing the power of architecture to



Mentor:

Dr. Wallis Miller

Charles P. Graves Associate Professor, School of Architecture

"Voices of Goodloetown" is the happy outcome of Patrick Hobgood's investigation of a long-neglected neighborhood located at the heart of Lexington. It is a very highly skilled rendering of his research in the form of an architectural design and yet it is more: it is an enactment of the problems and issues associated with doing research and drawing conclusions about a living community. Patrick's design to structure the exhibition as a series of overlapping, interweaving voices depicts the complexity of any attempt to define a community, especially from the outside. Goodloetown is a particularly apt example, because its potential disappearance depends on which voice gets a hearing. Patrick's exhibition engages the voices of those who have spoken while he gives others — the exhibition visitors — their own chance to speak. In doing so, the exhibition is not simply a documentation of the community's past by an outsider, but it actively participates in the community and, so, helps to shape its future.

affect the human spirit, my concentration in the following text explores not only the power of the human spirit to affect the spatial environment, but also how this effect can be conveyed through different medias displayed in the built environment of an exhibition.

In the spring of 2004, I presented a conceptual scheme for the redevelopment of Thoroughbred Park; my project proposed an architectural solution for arguably a holistically unsuccessful public space. The existing park does not function as a 'park' in the traditional sense; it is not publicly owned and does not serve as a gathering place for the local community. In fact, Thoroughbred Park functions to visually, physically, and mentally segregate the members of a low income, predominately African American neighborhood and to project an elitist depiction of a regional identity.¹

Thoroughbred Park functions as a three-dimensional billboard for the Bluegrass Region centered in Lexington. The park glorifies the commonwealth's thoroughbred industry, the rolling landscape, and the iconographic running stonewalls of the countryside. In my scheme for the redevelopment of Thoroughbred Park, I examined new functions for this public space including a community/cultural center, a visitor's center, job training facilities, an outdoor movie theater, a daycare center, an amphitheater, and exhibition spaces. By intertwining and overlapping these programs, the design intended to stimulate an atmosphere of diversity. However, after many visits to the park photographing and sketching, and sleepless nights hovering over miniscule models and ink drawings, I produced a project that did not connect with the community beyond a theoretical level.

What I felt after much contemplation was the emptiness of my architecture in the face of a struggling community. Could a series of contemporary buildings, interlaced with manicured gardens, embrace a community that has long since been discarded? I wondered how my proposal was any different than the existing park. Would it serve as a 'screen door' for the community as I intended, or would such a bold architectural gesture further segregate the community? I questioned the appropriateness and the relevance of my voice (embedded with notions of race, age, and gender) representing the needs of the Goodloe community. As a young white male and as an outsider, the issue of a community comprised largely of economically disadvantaged African-Americans seemed fragile territory. I did not want my work to present an audacious misconstruction of the residents



or their community. I questioned my architectural suggestion as a 'solution' for issues that far exceeded the realms of my personal experience. Ultimately, my project had fallen victim to my initial frustrations with the park. In this sense, Thoroughbred Park again served what I feel to be its most successful function: a visual, physical, and mental segregation of the Goodloe community. Although I strongly believe in the power of architecture, I feel it is impossible to create the pulse of a community through design of the built environment. Instead, I see how the people have persevered as a community in contradistinction to the physically deteriorating physical environment.

Contemporary View of Goodloe

The idea that detachment from the rest of the city operated as a negative condition for the livelihood of the Goodloe residents was an assumption my project held in its inception. I considered the separation of Goodloetown from Main Street and greater Lexington to be a result of external powers affecting the community. Fearing the members of the community would perceive me as one of these "external powers" played a role in my preconceived notions of Goodloe. My own prejudices became strikingly apparent while visiting the community. I feared for my safety in an area I perceived to be riddled with drugs and crime. I found myself wondering if I should lock my bicycle when I went to visit Rev. Wilson, and then wondering how that action might be perceived.

Though drugs, gambling, and prostitution are real threats to Goodloetown, they seem to be confined to certain areas of the community. The 200 block of

Race Street is one such area; at virtually any time of day one can watch the open transactions between drug dealers and passing motorists. What struck me most was when I would be riding with Rev. Wilson down Race Street. As he pointed out gambling houses, prostitutes, and young men who were quickly climbing the ladder from 'runners' to more significant dealers, he would be met with friendly hand gestures and cordial greetings. As his passenger, I was awestruck. Rev. Wilson, or Brother Mike as he is referred to in the community, is an outspoken community leader. Despite Brother Mike publicly advocating the removal of detrimental activities, the people perpetuating dealing, hooking, and gambling show respect and admiration for him. It is my belief that, although an environment might influence people to sell drugs, those same people still recognize the importance of a community leader such as Brother Mike.

The effects of segregation seemed a likely explanation for many of the community's problems. I had always assumed that integration was an asset to African American communities. However, integration permitted one of the most valuable resources to the Goodloe community, the public school, to be closed down as African American students were bused to other 'white' neighborhoods to go to school.² As a whole, the African American community in Lexington has lost four of the five public schools located in its neighborhoods, including the Constitution School, which was situated on the corner of Race Street and Second Street in the heart of the Goodloe neighborhood. In addition to the school, African American businesses along DeWeese Street and Third Street disappeared due to competition resulting from integration. The Lyric Theater lost its clientele to other venues. These are but a few of the educational, commercial, and cultural facilities lost to desegregation.

I am drawn to the extraordinary sense of the collective living environment that exists in Goodloetown. On visits to the neighborhood I have found an abundance of human interaction. Particularly when weather permits, many people engage with one another on their porches or in the streets. Density in the arrangement of domestic structures permits communication from house to house. The porch, like an external living room, serves as a zone between public and private, where neighbors can easily talk to one another or to people passing on the street. The short distance from the street to the front door of a residence creates a multitude of layers in the relationship between public and private space. The porch serves as a semi-public buffer zone between the private house and the public sidewalk.

Looking deeper, past preconception, into the com-

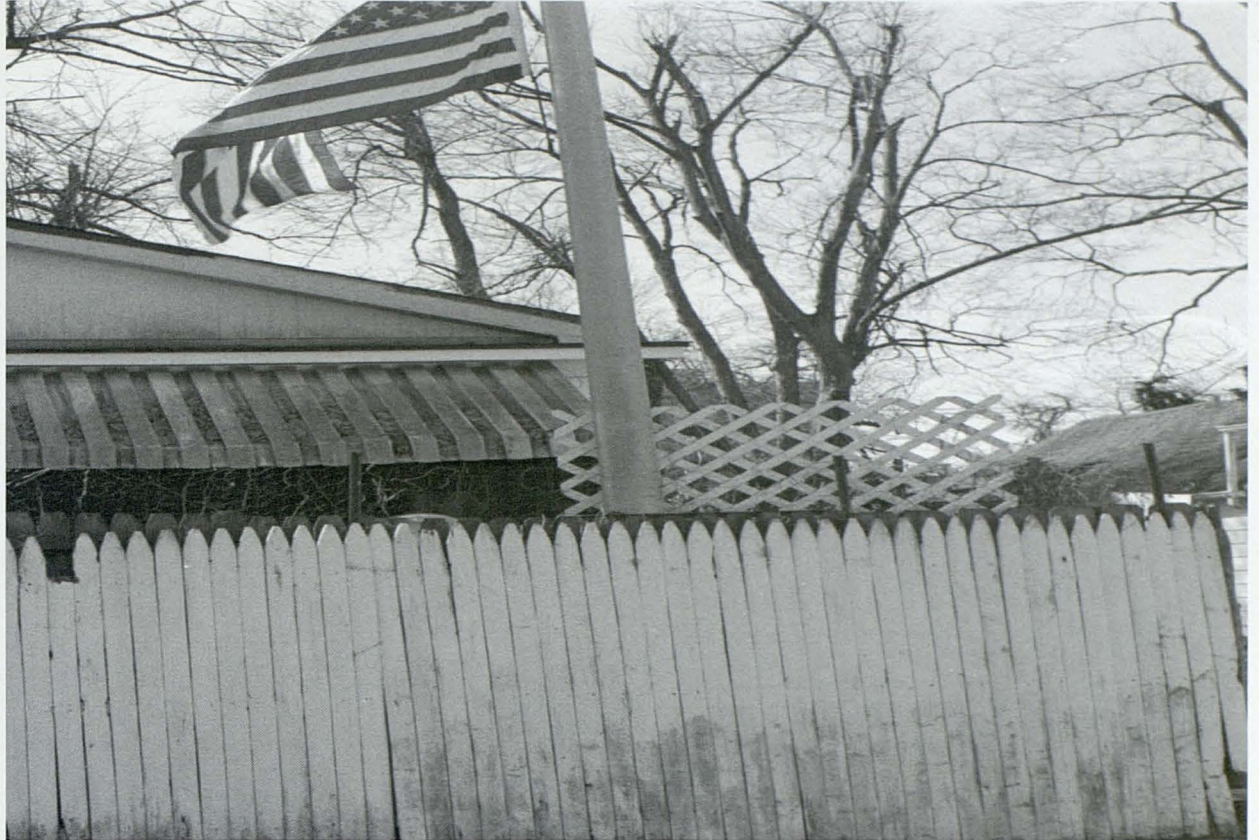


Goodloetown Front Porch

munity of Goodloe, I discovered that contemporary architecture and other forms in the built environment have hampered the livelihood of the inhabitants. Thoroughbred Park is one example of how a city can literally turn its back on its inhabitants. Other examples of this mentality are manifested in the revitalization of DeWeese Street, the deterioration of the Lyric Theater and, most recently, the planned East End redevelopment. The site of the East End redevelopment is the former home to the Kentucky Association Racetrack and is currently occupied by the Bluegrass Aspendale apartments, a low-income housing project. The redevelopment will remove the Bluegrass Aspendale apartments and replace them with mixed income housing units.

Replacing Bluegrass Aspendale, which lies just north of Goodloe on Fifth Street, will have a devastating effect on the existing community. Families whose roots are in the Aspendale neighborhood will be forced to relocate to other low-income housing sites in Lexington. As the re-urbanization plan calls for mixed-income housing units, large numbers of families living in the public housing will be displaced from their neighborhood. This displacement will occur on a massive scale, because there are over 350 residential units in Aspendale.

The long-term ramifications of redevelopment and subsequent displacement could further erode the



Goodloetown

existing African American community. Politically, the project will have an immediate impact on surrounding East End communities, including Goodloetown. Without Bluegrass Aspendale, the 1st District loses twenty percent of its African American population. The East End redevelopment will have a critical political impact on the voice representing the 1st District in the City Council. The logical conclusion for such a massive housing project includes the eventual redevelopment of the surrounding areas. Goodloe, only two blocks south of the proposed redevelopment, will inevitably be changed, if not permanently disfigured.

¹ Schein, Richard H., "Normative Dimensions of Landscape." In: Wilson, Chris and Paul Groth. *Everyday America: Cultural Landscapes After J.B. Jackson*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003 p. 216.

² Wright, George C., *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: In Pursuit of Equality, 1890-1980*. Kentucky Historical Society, 1992. p. 210.

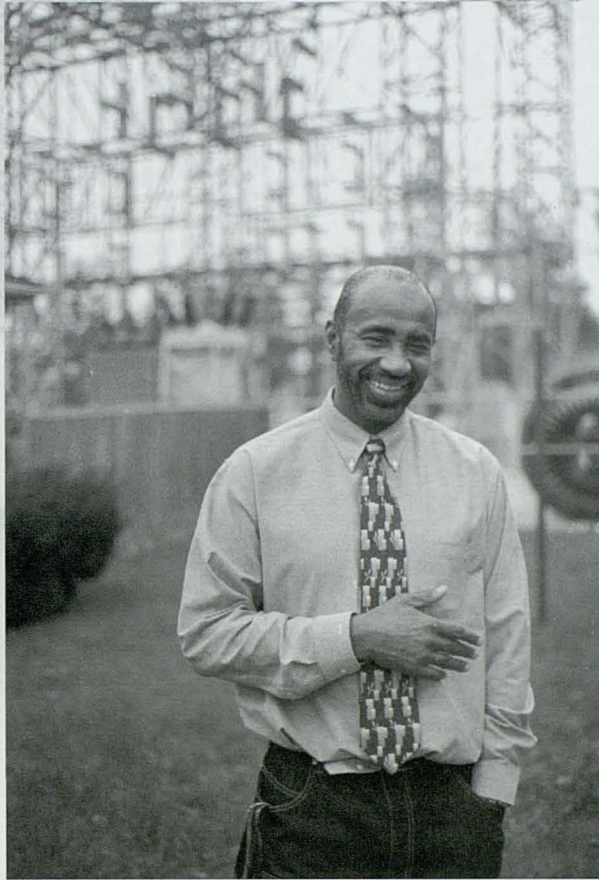
To see all the images in the exhibit, go to the on-line version of Kaleidoscope at www.uky.edu/kaleidoscope/fall2005.



Bluegrass Aspendale



DeWeese Street Redevelopment



Brother Mike — his church and the playground



Gathered at Smoot's Garage

