



illustration by | NICOLE GORRELL

HOW CULTURAL *Chasms* FORM

Past and present effects of gentrification and division on St. Louis communities

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
editor in chief

At first glance, the physical layout of St. Louis and the various cultures within the city don't seem to overlap. However, when examined through the lens of the destruction and separation of cultural communities, groups all over St. Louis have been affected by two things: gentrification and division.

Gentrification — changing neighborhoods through the addition of affluent homes and businesses — has been affecting cultural communities nationwide since the 1960s. The term itself was coined in 1964, and its effects are prevalent in present-day St. Louis. From the building of Busch Stadium II uprooting Chinatown in 1966, to the construction of a University City Costco that is displacing immigrant-owned restaurants

today, communities have been forced to reestablish themselves in new locations.

In addition, racial and socioeconomic divides are prevalent in St. Louis. This divide can be seen through research studies, such as 24/7 Wall St's study that named St. Louis the 10th most segregated city in the U.S., but also through an overhead drone shot of Delmar Boulevard. The south side features million dollar mansions and has a primarily white demographic, while the north side is poverty-stricken and is mostly inhabited by people of color. This difference stems from a segregationist legacy, and this Delmar Divide represents a nationally known phenomenon that gained fame after being featured in a 2012 BBC documentary.

In this in-depth, we explore examples of gentrification in St. Louis and take a look at the Delmar Divide through a cultural lens that ties the past to the present. 

Sources: Riverfront Times, ST. Louis Magazine, stlpublicradio, beyondchron, Gizmodo, Al Jazeera America

To destroy in the name of renewal is not a strange concept in urban planning. In the 1950s, Mill Creek Valley was one such neighborhood struck by a roaring wave of renovations. Around 20,000 Black people were displaced by demolition affecting over 5,000 buildings. The idea was to build a new highway, a stretch for those wealthy enough to avoid other unsavory parts of the city. Mill Creek was considered a slum, one that wouldn't be missed in St. Louis. But all the destruction plans written up in boardrooms fell through once applied to the concrete and mortar itself. They wanted economic development, but they were left with the rubble that once housed an entire community. The money continued to run dry, and all that was left was a poor scar upon the land. The metaphors write themselves in the twisting turn of history.

MILL CREEK VALLEY



COSTCO



These incidents aren't a legacy we've moved on from. As recently as 2021, we have seen the city disregard its people for profit. The promise of a new Costco, one that could bring millions of tax revenue, seemed to be worth the loss of culture for University City. It is being built in the place of a strip mall where once dozens of immigrant owned restaurants and businesses prospered and flourished. The new Costco threatens erasing decades of culture by suits in boardrooms, voices of the community rarely heard or considered. Familiar once again, sacrificing homes, schools, businesses and more for the sake of revitalization. To fill the coffers of the city, no price isn't worth it. History might not repeat, but it certainly rhymes. Even now, landowners can't lease or sell their homes, and construction noise has caused an outrage.

The location was originally known as Hop Alley, the Chinatown of St. Louis. From restaurants, tea shops and laundries, it was all demolished to make space for Busch Stadium II. Then with time, it began again: a wave of renovations. Urban renewal stopped not at the failure of Mill Creek Valley. No, the lesson learned there was merely that more money was needed. Busch Stadium II's plan was to raise the prices to bring in not the local people who once enjoyed baseball, but the wealthy suburbanites. The stadium made enough money to make more renovations. Neighborhoods around Busch Stadium II were replaced with luxury apartments, attracting more businesses. The old residents, surrounded by overpriced ventures and high property values, were forced out. Thus was formed our Ballpark Village, our "One Cardinal Way."

BUSCH STADIUM



A breakdown of gentrified St. Louis areas

TARIQ LASHELY

in-depth editor

St. Louis is a city of scars, of wounds — some covered, some laid bare for the world to see — and our history is one clouded in a combination of ignorance, ineducation and indifference. We live in a city built upon a city, where our monuments were once neighborhoods, where our centers were once communities. In seeking the truth of these not-so-hidden histories, one can learn the deeper culture, stories and legacies in the city we call home.

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GATEWAY ARCH



If one asked what the average American knew about St. Louis, the Arch would be in their first response. Inaugurated in 1967, the gateway has been a symbol of both westward expansion and the city itself for over 50 years now, but in its history reveals truth, a metaphor in a metaphor. Before the Arch, in its place was a prosperous neighborhood. It was one of the oldest in the city, and one with a large native Black population. This neighborhood was deemed expendable, so it was destroyed and its people displaced. Citywide, there was a vote to raze the neighborhood. Through condemnation and eminent domain — not purchase — the city acquired the riverfront land, demolishing the community and replacing it with our dearly beloved monument. A city that burnt down Black communities constructed its keystone monument on top of the corpse of one.

Recognized as the oldest Black community in Missouri, Kinloch's story, like the rest, is predictable. It was St. Louis Lambert International Airport that doomed the original inhabitants. The original airfield was home to historic pinpoints in aviation history, which is why Lambert was the city's priority rather than its Black and original inhabitants. In the 1980s, the city began to buy out property in Kinloch. Soon the airport owned a supermajority of all private homes, and 75% of its population fled. The economic effects were obvious, as the city plummeted further down a spiraling recursion. Poverty lead to crime, leading to more poverty, leading to more crime. This trajectory is common, and in this case was truly caused by the disregard of the communities of Kinloch. The success of Lambert Airport has covered up the lost community of Kinloch.

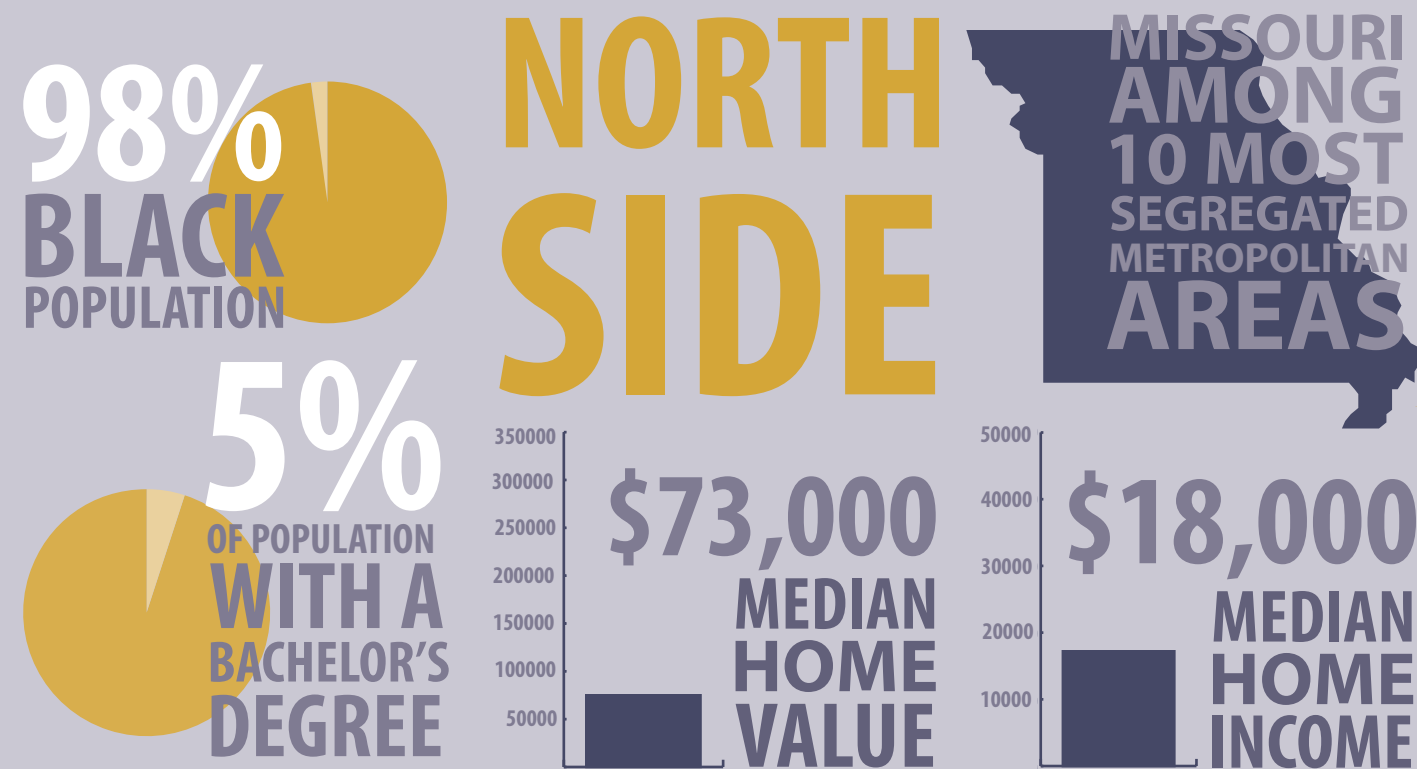
KINLOCH



I-44 I-55



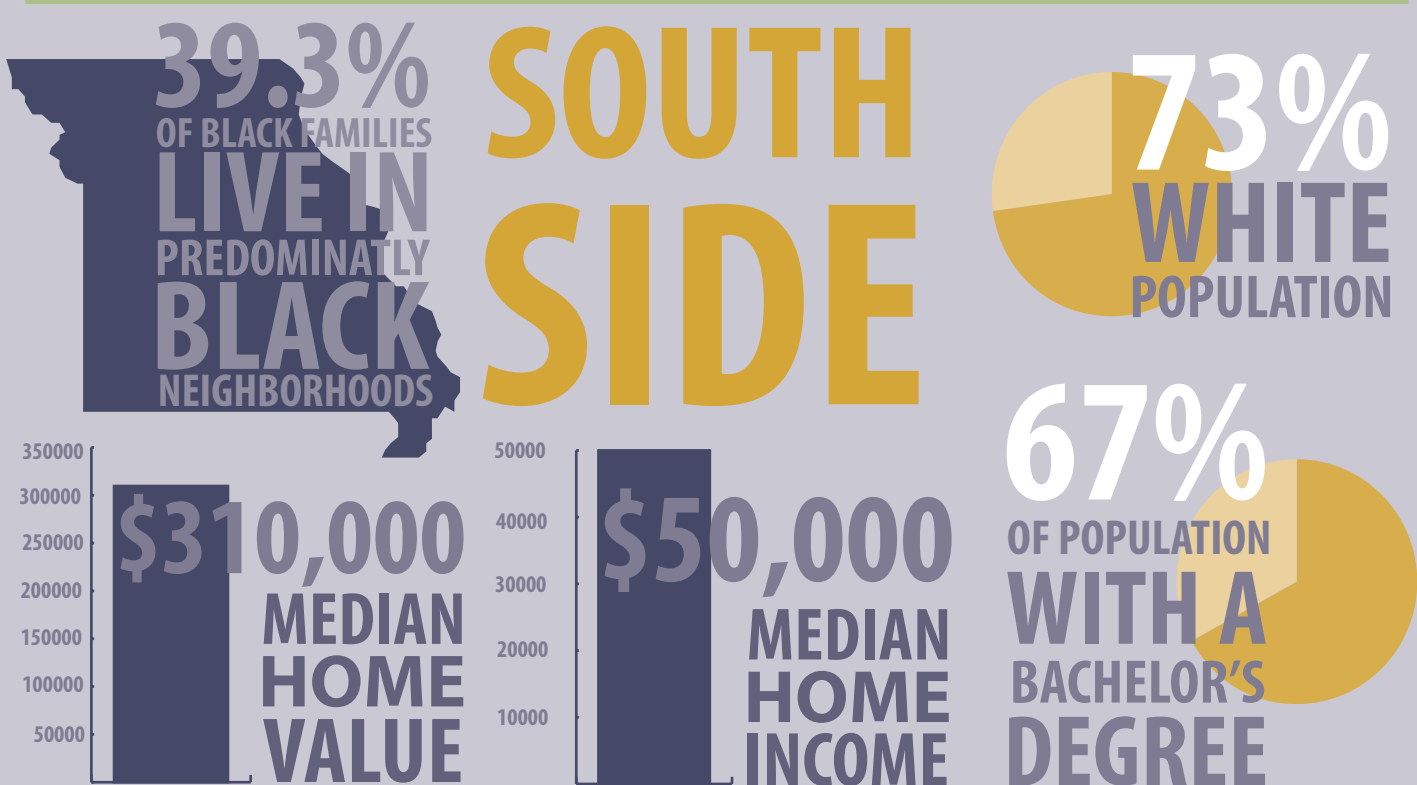
America is a motor country — the very foundations of cities were built upon the automobile — and nothing represents our motor country more than its region spanning interstate roads. In 1951, plans began to mesh together and failed during the construction of the I-44 and I-55 roads; the proto-highways were unfit to connect to the rest of the interstate. Thus plans had to be changed, and new areas were taken for the road. The southside of Lafayette Square, portions of Compton Heights, the north part of the Hill were all taken and transformed into interstates we know today. Original plans went further, some engulfing what is now the Benton Park neighborhoods. From this, we have our interstate. A tool which let the wealthy flee from the city into newly growing suburbs, beginning another downward stroke for the city.



Sources: MetroSTL, WUSTL, NextSTL

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Delmar Blvd



TWO WORLDS *Divided*

A closer look into how the Delmar Divide has split St. Louis in two

RILEY COATES
in-depth staff

Conversations most feared by the masses are those that are invaluable to the few. The hardest ones to have are the ones with the greatest impact, or the closest to home. Division within St. Louis City throughout history has created a physical barrier that has established a social hurdle not easily jumped. Residents living 10 miles apart have a clear distinction in their heads of “us” and “them” solely because of the stark difference in circumstance.

Delmar Boulevard is a physical reminder of all that separates North and South St. Louis. A difference in resources, income, health care, life trajectory and — most notably — race. This division is the modern-day result of decades of segregation that now exclude minority groups from opportunities. On the opposite side, there is a world of privilege shielded from this problem.

“I grew up in North St. Louis, so as kids we couldn’t go past Jenny Station road,” Maurice Harrison, St. Louis City resident of over 50 years, said. “When living in the city, you couldn’t go to the county unless you knew somebody, or your relatives wanted you out there with them, but that was rare. We stayed within our neighborhood because we were young black men, and they didn’t want us out there.”

The formation of such disconnect took upwards of a century, starting in the early 1900s, when Black families began moving North to St. Louis and beyond in what is called the Great Migration. However, this influx of Black families did not cause changes in policy. St. Louis City, at this point, already had a long-established housing system created to segregate white families from people of color.

As more Black people moved to St. Louis and the demand for housing increased, the focus of government leaders shifted to preserving segregation in the city. Trickling down all the way to maps of houses, these marks are still visible today.

“[Redlining] is the history of community groups, real estate agents and companies of city governments creating specific communities that they decide are not desirable any longer,” social studies teacher Ashley Lock said. “It was very typical as people were coming back from World War II to create these maps that were color coded. That’s where we get the term redlining, making green areas of maps the most desirable places to live and red areas were deemed as problematic properties or problematic neighborhoods.”

The effect of redlining on Black residents was reinforced by restrictive covenants, where predominantly white neighborhoods would meet in groups to create documents stating they would not sell their houses to people of color. This allowed realtors to avoid showing Black families housing in those areas.

“It was embedded within the structures to keep a group in power,” history teacher Meg Kaupp said. “Oftentimes that group was very intentionally white, and it was legal. Even when things were made illegal, they found other ways to push that into part of the structure. That’s why when you look around and you see for example, how the racial makeup is for our city, it’s very clear this didn’t just happen.”

Understanding how segregation of this extent could be upheld requires discerning how different the North and South sides of the city are from one another, acknowledging the differences in income and resources.

“The thing that comes along with ‘undesirable neighborhoods’ is an increase in crime, lack of access to education [and] lack of access to food, we call that food deserts,” Lock said. “That lack of access to wealth, that exposure to poverty, leaves people with an inheritance of violence and of inequity. This is what generations and generations of people inherit, and so it’s a historical pattern when all of these things overlap together.”

The Delmar Divide is ignored by those that aren’t affected by it. Those that are affected still lack the resources and visibility to incite change. The divide was pushed to the minds of every St. Louis resident on Aug. 9, 2014, when 18-year-old Michael Brown was fatally shot by police in Ferguson, Missouri.

“[People were] upset about it because it’s been going on for years,” Harrison said. “This wasn’t the first one, it was just the first one where they got caught. Now it’s, ‘Okay, Michael Brown is over, but what’s going to happen now?’ It seemed like everything died down until something else happened. It died down, but what’s the promise? The people aren’t promised anything, just pushed under the rug until things calm down.”

For many people, it’s easy to ignore what’s right in front of them. Pretending not to notice the constant struggles of those living some 10 miles away is easier than facing the uncomfortable reality. The first step towards lessening the severity of this situation is bringing awareness to it, mainly on the county side.

“Sometimes it takes people from the outside coming in and looking for the people, for whom this is their world, to go, ‘Wait a minute, maybe there’s more to this than I realize there is,’” Kaupp said. “Education is the key, it has to start young and from a place of just inviting people to a conversation.”

“

You can tell [there’s segregation] in the streets, you can tell in the neighborhoods. You can always tell somewhere.”

MAURICE HARRISON