The failure of the Central Indiana Cultural Foundation (CICF) to realize Fred Wilson’s *E Pluribus Unum* along the Indianapolis Cultural Trail revealed the contentious condition of public art, civic life, and urban redevelopment in the city. This photographic essay examines the trail’s urban site and situation in order to offer a spatial perspective on the *E Pluribus Unum* episode. We turned to photography and census data to better understand how the Cultural Trail’s urban context influenced the debate over Wilson’s proposed sculpture and how this setting might influence subsequent public endeavors to engage the city’s racialized heritage and redevelop its built environment.

The Indianapolis Cultural Trail opened with great fanfare in May 2013, after more than a decade of planning, fundraising, and construction. The CICF—the nonprofit arts foundation leading the trail’s development—hosted a ribbon-cutting event urging Hoosiers to explore the trail’s eight miles and the six designated cultural districts it connects. Promoted with the clever tagline “Get Down On It,” the event invited visitors to sing along with marching bands playing Kool and the Gang’s 1980s pop anthem of the same name. The day’s festivities included a wide variety of activities: parasol parades, live music and theater, and roving street performers joined with educational workshops on urban agriculture and storm-water filtration.

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From the start, lead organizer and CICF chief executive Brian Payne intended that the trail stand out for its thoughtful environmental design features and compelling public art. The opening event’s interactive street performances and, in particular, its opportunities for enrichment reflected the foundation’s desire to initiate a new kind of urban redevelopment, one that complemented the city’s emphasis on major conventions and mega-sporting events such as the Super Bowl and the Indianapolis 500. In contrast to the massive scale of these events and their venues, the Cultural Trail presents itself as a piece of infrastructure in step with twenty-first-century environmentalism, urban livability, and physical wellness. Applauded by designers, critics, and activists, the trail’s opening offered the city a rare opportunity to boast a trendsetting contribution to a global sustainable cities movement that links ecologically sensitive living with the promotion of a vibrant public sphere.

In this context, we think it particularly relevant to examine the varying degrees of gentrifying redevelopment along the Cultural Trail. The impact of redevelopment along the trail is not restricted to investment, in-migration, and revamped buildings. It spills over into surrounding neighborhoods, presumably generating higher rents and real-estate costs, as well as new forms of social life. Two generations of urban researchers have described this process of gentrification and the toll it has taken on successive generations of city dwellers. Long-time city watcher Sharon Zukin describes the process whereby “places for cool cultural consumption develop an attractive image for an unlikely neighborhood, which then sparks a commercial revival, a residential influx of people with money, and, finally, the building of new luxury apartments with extravagant rent.” The kind of “cool” cultural consumption Zukin writes about can take many shapes. It is often characterized by trendy nightspots replacing neighborhood pubs, upscale boutiques replacing corner stores, and cafes replacing greasy spoons. In this model—which the trail and its arts program promote—cultural consumption leads the way for the transformation of neighborhoods into hotspots for real-estate speculation while displacing existing residents and established modes of social life. The burdens of these displacements fall disproportionately on small property owners and renters and, in the context of center-city Indianapolis, African Americans. These displacements have been an ongoing feature of the city’s

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political economy since at least the 1960s, generating the kind of resentment, distrust, and opposition that derailed *E Pluribus Unum*. Examining a project like the Cultural Trail can help us to decipher the bitter debate over *E Pluribus Unum*.

The origins of the Cultural Trail lie with the crisis of revenue and relevance visited upon so many downtown districts in the post-World-War-II years. A combination of suburbanization and federal housing
policy, interstate highways, and deindustrialization left downtowns across North America in crisis. In response, Indianapolis focused its revitalization strategy on sports- and convention-related tourism. A downtown mall, tax-supported stadiums and convention space, and a full slate of events attracted customers and revenue to the central city. And when a powerful player in the revitalization strategy faltered, as happened in 2011 when the city’s NBA franchise faced bankruptcy, it received a $33 million taxpayer-funded bailout. The once-somnolent downtown awoke to the bright lights of franchised good times as a space primed to host conventioneers and fans.

The impact of downtown development on quality of life for residents of Center Township (the municipal designation for downtown and its immediate environs) is much more problematic. The 2010 Census reports that the percentage of township residents engaged in the low-wage leisure and hospitality industry is nearly double the state average. In the same year, the market value of a detached home in the township was only slightly more than half the state average of $160,000. The Cultural Trail attempts to bridge this gap between downtown’s thriving tourist district and its neglected neighborhoods and residents. Reflecting its designers’ intentions, the trail extends beyond the well-defined tourism zone (indicated on the map by the cluster of attractions southwest of city center) to promote a different kind of cultural product, by making city neighborhoods better places to live, not just visit. Payne recalled the logic underlying the original proposal for the trail: “We can’t sell it as an infrastructure project, we had to sell it as a quality of life and economic development project.” The pitch was compelling enough to elicit millions of dollars in donations from the city’s benefactors and $20.5 million in federal economic stimulus funds.

Automotive-fueled suburbanization and its attendant social policies (e.g., tax-subsidies for interstate highways and mortgages) have not been kind to downtown Indianapolis. The city has been losing population to its outlying districts for two generations. Since 1950, Center Township has shed approximately sixty percent of its population, losing on average

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2Mason King, “CIB approves $33.5 million deal to keep Indiana Pacers,” Indiana Business Journal, July 16, 2011.

30,000 residents each decade. Census estimates for 2012 report a modest increase in population, the first in sixty-two years. That a one-percentage-point increase in population—just shy of 3,000 persons—is cause for hope provides a bracing indication of downtown’s fortunes as a place to live.

Among the efforts undertaken by the city’s managers and business leaders to stanch the flow, the merger of the city and county governments in 1970 is particularly relevant to any discussion of the Cultural Trail and *E Pluribus Unum*. The city-county merger—known locally as Unigov—enlarged the municipal tax base and, not incidentally, ensured a subsequent generation of Republican mayoral leadership. It also effectively diluted the burgeoning African American vote by expanding the city’s boundaries to include large swaths of predominantly white suburbs. African Americans constituted a near majority of (Democratic) voters in 1970, but they made up less than half of all voters in the newly merged Unigov municipal entity.5

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While cities across the Midwest have elected African American mayors and city councils in subsequent decades, only white men have held the office of mayor of Indianapolis.

It was against this backdrop of long-thwarted African American political power that the public presentation of Wilson’s *E Pluribus Unum*—including the artist’s credentials, the project’s beneficent funding, digital renderings of the artwork, and its pre-approved site at the City-County Building—elicited such stinging criticism. Particularly galling to opponents was the manner in which *E Pluribus Unum* cited the city’s black heritage, while the people responsible for its commission solicited no meaningful public participation in the selection, design, or choice of site for the work. Speaking at a conference assembled in the affair’s aftermath, Amos Brown, a local African American media personality and prominent opponent of the project, was careful to distinguish between the artist and the project. Roundly praising Wilson for his willingness to engage his critics, Brown called attention to the selection process and placed the affair in its larger political context when he stated that opponents of *E Pluribus Unum* “don’t oppose the player, we oppose the game.” Brown made it clear that the “game” in question was not just the high-handed roll-out of *E Pluribus Unum* but also the generations-long practice of ignoring black Indianapolis and its concerns. In a city where African Americans constituted over a quarter of the 2010 population, *E Pluribus Unum* and the Cultural Trail’s broader agenda to position Indianapolis as a cosmopolitan city ran headlong into a group of people resolved to control the means of their own representation.

The more immediate context of the Cultural Trail involves two urban revitalization initiatives—one lackluster, the other popular—from the 1990s. The trail deliberately connects the city’s designated “Cultural Districts,” which emerged from a city-coordinated effort to expand its tourism brand beyond the well-established core of sport and conventions. Proponents wanted to attract arts-and-culture tourists by promoting venues outside downtown’s circuit of massive hotels and franchised good times. Accordingly, the marketing campaign portrayed the city as a collection of intriguing, place-specific destinations—the newly minted Cultural Districts—enticing gallery- and cafe-oriented visitors away from Indianapo-

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6Brown spoke at the “Art, Race, and Space” symposium at IUPUI, January 25, 2013. A video of his comments can be found online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAOXpLRQH38&list=PLaB-5Lb3XNNbykHHp-ED_QW44g_KnsX4E&index=1, at approximately 17:23.
lis's mid-sized urban competitors, such as Louisville, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. The results were noticeably mixed. While downtown maintained a brisk trade in sports bars and steakhouses, the branded districts remained insular and out-of-the-way. Most visitors apparently took no notice of the sturdy signage and suggested itineraries. They, and their dollars, stubbornly remained in downtown's established tourism zone.

Visitors' lukewarm enthusiasm for the Cultural Districts stood in bold relief to the popularity of the Monon Trail among city residents. Following the defunct Monon Railroad's right-of-way, the seventeen-mile pedestrian-and-bicyclist path emerged as a result of city planners' efforts to join the rails-to-trails movement that had spread across the country. Impressed by the Monon's relevance, Payne began soliciting support from donors for a multi-use trail scaled to complement downtown's street grid. Importantly, the Monon had been in use long enough for both its popularity and positive effect on property values to be evident. He pitched the new project as one that would simultaneously connect the city's disparate districts and establish its standing as an arts destination.

Lessons learned from the Monon Trail provided a template for the Cultural Trail's thoughtfully designed network of spacious, well-lit pedestrian- and bike-oriented pathways. In order to facilitate a host of user experiences, the trail incorporates what the Project for Public Spaces describes as "placemaking": the process of designing built environments that promote personal and civic well-being. The trail features carefully chosen pavement, plantings, and signage along its full extent to create the kind of visual contrast and fine-grained texture intended simultaneously to build place identity and promote use by multiple constituencies.

The city committed no taxpayer funds to build or maintain the sixty-three-million-dollar Indianapolis Cultural Trail. Promoters repeatedly cited the absence of city funding while introducing this rare urban amenity to the city. Consonant with the city's long history of elite-driven public-private partnerships and privatized municipal services, promoters relied on gifts from individual philanthropists and private foundations for two-thirds of its funding. The Glick Family Foundation's influence and generosity (gifts totaling nearly $18 million) are reflected in the trail's full name: "The Indianapolis Cultural Trail: A Legacy of Gene and Marilyn Glick."

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7 Project for Public Spaces, How to Turn a Place Around: A Handbook for Creating Successful Public Spaces (New York, 2000).
Cultural Trail signs greet drivers and pedestrians as they enter Fountain Square.

Courtesy, Owen Dwyer
Signs and trail-side plantings facilitate users’ experience of the trail.

Courtesy, Owen Dwyer
A portion of the Glicks’ gift resulted in the “Glick Peace Walk,” which anchors the trail’s northern corridor and features lighted sculptures, each accompanied by an informational plaque, highlighting the biographies of a dozen men and women who promoted peace. The Glicks chose an eclectic list of individuals, including Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, the Wright Brothers, Thomas Edison, and Booker T. Washington. The biographical sketch of Washington is notable for what it does not include. Washington’s emphases on diligence, education, and thrift are singled out, while the coincident rise of Jim Crow goes unmentioned. Washington was indeed a monumental figure in post-Reconstruction racial politics, but his conciliatory style was criticized by contemporaries such as W. E. B. DuBois. In the wake of the failure to realize E Pluribus Unum, the Glicks’ private, selectively interpreted memorial to Washington stands out among the very small number of public memorials to African Americans in Indianapolis. The city’s lack of involvement in the Cultural Trail suggests the extent to which private interests are competing to shape downtown’s built environment and its sense of place.
The Booker T. Washington memorial stands along the Glick Peace Walk.

Courtesy, Owen Dwyer
The rich production values of the Glick Peace Walk in particular and of the trail’s polished mix of textures and details in general stand in marked contrast to the condition of less well-endowed bike lanes and parks elsewhere in the city. Weather-beaten signage for the city’s Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park and a pock-marked bicycle lane along Michigan Street bear witness to earlier efforts to commemorate the city’s diverse heritage and promote sustainable urban living. The wanting condition of these taxpayer-funded efforts—King Park’s memorial surrounded by treeless, sun-scorched turf and the bike lane’s tremulous path along the road’s shoulder—testifies to the challenges the city faces when it acts on its own, without the private donations and federal funding that endowed the trail’s public arts program and its six-million-dollar trust fund for maintenance. They also place in high relief the power and vision wielded by the trail’s backers, in what amounts to an ambitious bid to rework public space and its attendant discourses of what to expect from urban living.

This bid to rework and redevelop is on display in the trail’s environmental sustainability endeavors, which include dozens of street-side storm-water retention ponds—referred to as bioswales—installed along the trail’s length. Stocked with native species of wildflower, the bioswales offer a street-side, environmentally self-conscious counterpoint to the federally mandated, enormously expensive storm-water holding tanks currently under construction to address the longstanding problem of storm water rushing into the city’s sanitary sewers and subsequently spewing waste into streams and the White River. The confluence of discourses of environmental sustainability and urban livability that resulted in these labor-intensive pieces of urban infrastructure have the potential to unite the formerly competing goals of environment and economy.

Having examined the context of the Cultural Trail, some of its signature features, as well as some of the city’s comparative infrastructure, we move on to survey the southeast leg of the trail, running along Virginia Avenue and terminating in the Fountain Square Cultural District, an area undergoing rapid social and economic transition. This section of the trail highlights the complexities of redevelopment, as shifting, and in some cases competing, landscapes take shape.

Strolling and biking, seeing and being seen, are central to the Cultural Trail’s nightlife. In contrast to the city’s predominant mode of passive, spectator-sport leisure culture, the trail’s mix of conspicuous mobility and cafe sociability enjoys a kind of cachet due to its scarcity elsewhere. The unfocused, serendipitous nature of the urban idyll further distinguishes itself in contrast with workplaces dominated by productivity speed-ups,
A weathered street sign for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park, on the city’s near northside.

Courtesy, Owen Dwyer

A bicyclist and driver make their way toward downtown along Michigan Street.

Courtesy, Owen Dwyer
intricate performance metrics, and the wholesale outsourcing of tasks. As is the case with hiking and biking on more traditional trails, questions arise about the class bias of mobile recreation: for whom is the Cultural Trail a compelling form of relaxation and leisure?

The answer appears clear. The trail promotes art and sustainable urbanism to attract creative-class residents and workers. Beyond its playful allusion to disco-era good times, the “Get Down On It” slogan explicitly announces one of the trail’s major objectives—attracting suburban dwellers downtown to live, work, and play. Beginning in the early 2000s, Richard Florida’s work on urban redevelopment emphasized the roles of tolerance, diversity and educational achievement in attracting the “Creative Class” to a city or a particular urban area. The presence of “creatives” in turn spurs urban economies, according to Florida and other creative economy

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enthusiasts. The Cultural Trail’s public art and the redevelopment occurring along the trail align with the creative class vision.

One such example of the trail’s public art is Donna Sink’s “Moving Forward,” a series of six bus shelters fitted to pollutant-absorbing concrete pads and overlaid with the work of local poets. Translucent panels enable the poems to be projected onto the sidewalk inside the shelters. The bus shelter along Virginia Avenue at Fletcher Place features Karen Kovacik’s poem “Invisible Moments,” which includes a textual fragment interweaving creative labor, bicycle commuting, urban redevelopment, and Indianapolis native Kurt Vonnegut. Under the bolded title, “Where words become poems,” the first-person narrative asks readers to identify with the protagonist, who imagines: “I’m biking to work, Vonnegut/in my pack, through a district/that’s disappeared.” The bus shelter self-consciously addresses bicycle commuters, though it is just as likely to be viewed by public transit riders, and articulates the nostalgic allure of the industrial city now being replaced.

Situated further southeast along the trail in Fletcher Place, only steps away from the Sink/Kovacik bus shelter, the Hinge building combines amenity-rich residential, retail, and work space. Among its tenants is the Bureau, a highly polished co-working space marketed to sole proprietors and contract professionals. The Bureau’s website advertises a $275 monthly membership fee entitling self-employed workers to desk space, meeting facilities, Internet connectivity and the atmosphere of a stylish, upscale workspace.9 Co-working facilities like the Bureau promise productive interactions and synergies for the growing ranks of freelancers who would otherwise occupy cafes, public libraries, and kitchen tables.

From this vantage, the Bureau fits well with the way the Hinge owners describe the building’s relative position outside of downtown, along the trail and enmeshed in Fletcher Place and Fountain Square’s mix of creative pursuits and entertainments. From another viewpoint, these shared work environments reveal the ways in which so-called “flexible” or “contingent” labor arrangements transfer costs from enterprises onto workers. The buzz surrounding co-working incubators is representative of the once-new, now well-established modes of flexible specialization associated with outsourcing and deindustrialization more generally.10 A

Donna Sink’s “Moving Forward” bus stop installation, near the intersection of Virginia Avenue and McCarty Street.

Courtesy, Matthew McCourt

The mixed-use Hinge building, along the trail in Fletcher Place.

Courtesy, Owen Dwyer
case in point is the excitement over new workplace arrangements like the Bureau. Their allure deflects attention from the deliberate erosion of hard-won, taken-for-granted norms regarding the time and place for work in our lives, along the way rendering anachronistic fixed workdays, weekends, holidays, and sick leave.

A portion of the Cultural Trail along Virginia Avenue runs beneath a parking garage and railroad tracks. Less than a quarter-mile in length, the underpass is nonetheless an intimidating piece of urban infrastructure. Dim lighting, hulking support columns, echoing footsteps, and limited sightlines accentuate the strangely claustrophobic feel of what is otherwise a cavernous space. The underpass is where the built environment and the threat of harm—a fear that in an urban setting is not only gendered but also highly racialized—crystallize into the kind of dystopian place typically avoided by pedestrians and bicyclists.

Virginia Avenue displays two dramatically different strategies for managing perceptions of public safety inspired by the underpass. On one side of the street, the Cultural Trail confidently enters and exits the underpass, its path delineated with brick pavers and sturdy signage. Plentiful ambient lighting diminishes the sense of subterranean seclusion and gives the place a purposeful identity.

On the other side of the street—and a world away in terms of urban design—a brightly lit, CCTV-surveilled, passcard-accessible, enclosed walkway provides a secure point of entry and exit into the nearby Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield regional headquarters. Where the Cultural Trail offers visual cues of openness and invitation, the Anthem access tunnel relies on hardened surfaces and limited access to inspire trust. The enclosed passage would appear at home in the segregated, hardened infrastructure of 1990s Los Angeles that Mike Davis scrutinized in his book *City of Quartz*.

Like Los Angeles, which has embarked on its own program of revitalizing public space and transit, the Cultural Trail presents a nuanced, more accommodating mode of moving through fear-inducing public spaces.

On a late Friday night we witnessed one of the trail’s accomplishments: a diverse stream of Cultural Trail users that included retirement-age couples, spurts of fixed-gear bike riders, skateboarders, and club-hopping revelers. Emerging from the underpass, the trail leads users past Eli Lilly and Company’s corporate campus toward Fletcher Place’s trail-side cluster of retail space and condominiums. Further along, the trail crosses above eight lanes of interstate on its way to Fountain Square.

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Pedestrians wait to cross the trail at the corner of Virginia Avenue and Prospect Street.  
Courtesy, Owen Dwyer

Bicycles along the Cultural Trail on a Friday night in Fountain Square.  
Courtesy, Owen Dwyer
The stream of cyclists and pedestrians along the Cultural Trail is diverse and variable depending on the time of day and week—families, retired couples, young people, all from a wide variety of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. We pondered the range of people venturing through the underpass and across the highway overpass. What about the trail inspired such confidence? Was it the signage and lighting? The widened sidewalk, improved curbing, bollards that buffered cyclists and pedestrians from vehicular traffic?

The next day, we remarked on the trail’s nighttime usage to a local bike patrol police officer who agreed, adding an off-hand comment about the lack of “troublemakers” among trail users. The police officer felt the trail brought out the “right kind of people”—presumably commuters, customers, sightseers, and others performing purposeful, sanctioned activities. The presence of the “right kind of people,” he commented, stabilizes local businesses, implicitly leading to well-kept storefronts and, in the words of urban scholar Jane Jacobs, more “eyes upon the street.”

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In September 2011, executives of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail announced that they had received an ArtPlace grant to install “an interactive light environment” designed by artist Vito Acconci. Mimicking a cloud of fireflies, Swarm Street sought to inspire cheer along the otherwise dreary Virginia Avenue underpass portion of the Trail. The installation featured hundreds of motion-triggered LED lights embedded in the trail’s pavement and overhead via an intricate web of steel tubing, all designed to interact playfully with pedestrians and bicyclists. Like *E Pluribus Unum*, however, *Swarm Street* suffered numerous delays and was severely curtailed by CICF. Whereas *E Pluribus Unum* succumbed to popular opposition, *Swarm Street* suffered from technical glitches. The project’s director, Mindy Taylor Ross, chalked up its failure to unanticipated complications posed by the site’s preponderance of pigeons and moisture.13

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The fruitful careers of Vito Acconci and Fred Wilson testify to their art world success. Neither of their installations, however, successfully translated that experience into workable public art in Indianapolis, albeit for very different reasons mentioned above. The setbacks encountered by the trail’s two most expensive installations highlight a key distinction between the public space of a city street and the carefully controlled environment of galleries and museums. The audience for museums is generally self-selecting; if individuals want to engage controversial material, they enter. In contrast, public art is capable of confronting all who pass nearby. Thus, opponents of *E Pluribus Unum* doubted the wisdom of selecting a site so central to the city’s business to display what they characterized as a slave image. The City-County Building houses not only the mayor’s office and council chambers but also the police court and its daily stream of manacled prisoners. Opponents questioned the propriety of confronting prisoners—a disproportionate share of them African American—with an installation they decried as denigrating and anachronistic. The distinction between public space and museum space—between choosing to view a provocative piece of artwork and being forced to see it on the street—proved central to CICF’s decision to cancel *E Pluribus Unum*.

The failures to fully realize *Swarm Street* and *E Pluribus Unum* stand in marked contrast to the success of Labor Day weekend’s “SubSurface” graffiti street art event. Organized by local street artists and public-art activists working in conjunction with Fountain Square property owners, SubSurface is in its eleventh year. The event attracts aerosol artists, hip-hop performers, and critical attention from around the country. In 2013, it enjoyed support-in-kind from Keep Indianapolis Beautiful and Sun King Brewery. Signs posted along the trail invited spectators to witness the dozen walls in the process of being transformed. The resulting mix of artists and spectators testifies to the trail’s potential for serendipitous, urban pleasures and suggests the value of more homegrown art programs.

Any move to make downtown Indianapolis more livable and environmentally sustainable merits attention, given the city’s longstanding commitment to oversized roadways and subsidized spectator sports, and its chronic rates of such environment-related diseases as obesity and asthma. From this perspective, the Cultural Trail—as linear park, environmental sustainability initiative, and economic development engine—deserves the accolades it has received. That said, what happens to the traditional urban social justice agenda when bicycling, environmentalism, upscale condos, arts events, etc., become the signal values for new collective ventures? Efforts to secure a living wage, curb gun violence, and improve
“Roy,” a street artist, poses next to his mural, beside the Cultural Trail in Fountain Square, on Labor Day weekend 2013.

Courtesy, Matthew McCourt

Street artists and spectators gather near the trail in Fountain Square, Labor Day weekend 2013.

Courtesy, Matthew McCourt
educational opportunities—urgent issues for many of those who opposed *E Pluribus Unum*—are displaced by the kind of redevelopment discourse that accompanies projects like the Cultural Trail.

Two generations ago, common sense among urban researchers dictated “slum” removal and massive highway projects. Only after mass depopulation through white flight and the replacement of divested neighborhoods with dystopian housing projects and interstate highways were urban renewal’s prescient critics acknowledged. Today, those criticisms enjoy the status of received truth and, ironically, provide the discursive fuel for another round of urban redevelopment. While the wrecking balls and highway projects that accompanied “urban renewal” in the 1960s are largely past, today’s redevelopment projects—including the Indianapolis Cultural Trail: A Legacy of Gene and Marilyn Glick—make their own impact on the city’s cultural landscape.

Urban renewal projects from whatever era produce winners and losers, insiders and outsiders, as property values and cultural milieus change. Despite redevelopment’s high-minded ideals and rhetoric, projects like the Cultural Trail are central to the reproduction of cultural authority. The cacophony of contentment and dissatisfaction that accompanies the production of such authority can be heard in the debate over *E Pluribus Unum* and can be seen alongside the Cultural Trail. As this photo essay illustrates, the undoing of *E Pluribus Unum* is echoed in the Cultural Trail’s displacements, unsettling existing values, exchanging old priorities for new, and remaking the downtown’s urban fabric.