

Bicycle Lanes & Coffee Shops – It's Too Late

If, by chance, you're leisurely driving through a very familiar neighborhood at 9 o'clock at night with your windows rolled all the way up in let's say... Detroit, Baltimore, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., Camden, Philadelphia, Chicago, Atlanta, New Orleans, or Los Angeles, an area that you recall just five years ago was dilapidated, run down, drug-infested, high-crime, liquor stores on every other corner, prostitutes and harmless homeless people walking up to your car, corner markets with thick glass counters, dimly lit streets at night, squeegee man offering to wash our windshield, a hustling and bustling area nonetheless, then you surprisingly observe new bicycle lanes, coffee shops on every other corner, nicely paved streets, speed bumps, bright lane markers, two guys jogging by, Audis, Saabs, Volvos, and Prii (*plural for Prius*) parked in marked parking spaces, highly illuminating street lamps, frequent restricted parking signs, police visibly patrolling, and a young blonde women on her iPhone slowly walking her Jack Russell Terrier without a worry or a care, then it's too late!!! Your old stomping ground has been GENTRIFIED! And there's absolutely nothing you can do about it.

Your 'Chocolate City,' which came into existence after the 1960s riots, when white folks (mostly working-class), fearing for their lives, fled the big cities (which were close to their jobs) for the safety, tranquility, and open space of the newfound suburbs, has all but disappeared. Of course, they could live anywhere their little hearts desired since 'red-lining' and procuring that all important mortgage loan from their banks were no problem at all. Thus, their lives began anew... still not quite understanding or appreciating WHY the riots took place.

Black folks, on the other hand, toughed it out and slowly rebuilt

their lives after the riots. Neighborhoods that were slightly integrated became mostly Black. Poor whites who couldn't afford to move out stayed behind. Jewish, Irish, Italian, and Polish corner storeowners and merchants either left town or were replaced with other ethnic people.

Black mayors were later elected in all of these big cities, and in some instances, Black Police Chiefs and Fire Chiefs were also appointed. City Councils members (or Aldermen), previously all white, became mostly Black as time went on.

Clearly, political power shifted in most of these big cities during the 1970s and 1980s, although, not necessarily the purse strings and economic power. These remained in the hands of white power brokers, even though major construction and downtown development projects were completed during the tenures of many Black mayors.

During the national and local economic downturns over this same period (working class Blacks lost jobs), along with increased incomes and open housing opportunities for middle-class Blacks, Black flight to the suburbs began.

So after a while, with mostly poor Black and white folks, with many on some type of subsidized subsistence, unable to provide a viable tax base, austerity measures went into effect and many of these cities began/continued a downward economic spiral.

Homeowners become renters, upkeep of property dwindles, city services decrease (e.g., bus services, trash pickup, snow removal, police/fire delayed response, etc.), public school funding (with hungry children) decreases, vacant homes appear, infrastructure repairs are delayed (e.g., bridge, tunnels, overpasses), road repairs aren't completed, drug economy emerges, and crime increases. This conditions continue and worsen over many, many years. (Then you get a Detroit...) A large city just can't function properly!

After 25 or so years, many of these suburban white folks, tired of commuting 30 to 50 miles to work, realize how lifeless, boring, and 'soul-less' the 'burbs are, and realize that a hustling, bustling 'downtown' area is the heart and soul of a metropolis. Always has been, always will be.

All the while, yuppies and millennials also take advantage of a golden opportunity to live in a hip, swank, 'rad,' and totally awesome part of town!!!

In the meantime, those wealthy investors and venture capitalists, eyeballing prime (cheap) real estate among the ruins of a fallen big city, decide to wait out the Democratically-elected Black mayor's tenure until the election of a more business-friendly white (and Republican) mayor. Trust me, this master plan was not hashed out overnight, but rather has been in the works for 15-20 years.

Once the new mayor grabs the reigns, new money is poured into specific areas of the city, houses and apartments are renovated, new homes and high-rises are built, old tenants are priced out of the area, tax incentives are offered to new home buyers, undesirables are removed, streets are repaved, new and brighter streetlights are added, police patrols are shored up, new businesses are welcomed (bars, restaurants, gyms, banks/ATM machines, bookstores, computer repair shops, ski shops, bike shops), coffee shops appear, AND bicycle lanes are added to appease the many Lance Armstrong wannabes (at the expense of one whole car lane in cities already suffering major congestion)!

And, of course, any other amenities, pleasures, and conveniences that will improve the quality of life for these new inhabitants, and make them more wholesome, relaxed, happy, and less stressful, will be added "forthwith and with all deliberate speed." No expense will be spared.

After all, they're 'entitled' to this wonderful life. Meanwhile, in

Flint, Michigan, the water crisis continues...

So in a few years, if not already, you may find yourself feeling like an outsider in your new, gentrified 'Vanilla City'... "May I help you, Sir? And what is the exact nature of your business in this area?"

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