PART ONE

ZONING, RAZING, OR REHABILITATION
The idea of slum clearance as an appropriate treatment for old neighborhoods such as Over-the-Rhine took shape in the 1920s and 1930s and flourished until the mid-1950s. It found some of its staunchest supporters among city planners who sought to encourage cosmopolitanism as a characteristic of residents in the metropolis. These planners defined cosmopolitanism as the sharing of behavioral traits among diverse groups of people without the destruction of each group's sense of its given and distinctive cultural identity, and they sought to promote cosmopolitanism by making it a new and key element of good citizenship. The planners meant, of course, that good citizens should possess the will and ability to earn their living, lead responsible social lives, and obey the law. But the planners also thought that good citizens bore a responsibility to understand and tolerate the various cultural groups in the city, and that all groups should be willing to subordinate from time to time their special interests for the sake of the public interest. By this planners now meant not only steps to advance the safety, comfort, and mental and physical health of all city residents, but also steps to promote the city's cosmopolitan social mission.¹

The linking of good citizenship to cosmopolitanism did not itself justify slum clearance. But the cosmopolitan project took shape from a
social deterministic viewpoint that suggested both the focus on the city as a whole and the drastic treatment of slums. This viewpoint defined cities in culturally pluralistic terms that took groups as the basic units of society and assumed that each possessed or should possess a coherent and durable culture, defined as a total way of life. Groups acquired their culture, according to this line of thought, from their history and experience in varying social and physical environments, an explanation that made each group's identity and behavior the product of inexorable processes beyond the control of its members. This perspective also made all groups seem equal or potentially equal as components of urban life by positing a tangled complex of urban interdependence in which the dysfunctioning or disintegration of one group or part of the system not only impeded the functioning of the whole but also affected the operation of each of the other groups and parts.

This understanding of the city made slums seem extremely dangerous, for comprehensive city planners not only defined them as areas of mixed land uses and peoples who lived under congested conditions in old, obsolescent, and dilapidated dwellings. They also contended that slums eroded the coherence of cultural groups and left a residue of freestanding, impoverished, anomic, and alienated individuals, hapless people bereft of social and civic will who provided fodder for demagogues and political opportunists and were likely recruits into lives of crime, vice, violence, and disease. Worse still, city planners saw slums as cancerous, for they seemed to spread both contiguously and in leap-frog fashion, creating blight in adjacent and more remote territories, a condition that weakened the social and civic will of even more residents and diminished the possibility of establishing in those areas good citizenship based on intergroup tolerance and understanding and a willingness to sacrifice for the public welfare.

But comprehensive planners did not worry exclusively about slums and blight, for social determinism prompted profound concerns about the disruption of democracy through intense competition and conflict among groups outside of slums. This prospect seemed likely if not inevitable in a city composed of groups with given and distinctive ways of life, a situation that made intergroup understanding, tolerance, and cooperation virtually impossible and sacrifice for cosmopolitanism unlikely. So planners, city officials, and civic leaders touted good citizenship ideals...
not only in the slums but throughout the varied neighborhoods of the city. Short-term tactics featured civic education campaigns that stressed the social rather than the biological determinism of group cultures, emphasized the legitimacy and equality of all cultural groups, praised the virtues of compromise, denounced extremism and political opportunism, preached the gospel of intergroup respect, understanding, and tolerance, and exhorted all groups to make sacrifices for the promotion of the welfare of the whole.²

The long-term strategy for promoting good citizenship and cosmopolitanism extended well beyond the realm of civic education. It consisted of a cultural engineering program involving the use of city planning as a key element in forging a cosmopolitan population. Social determinism, that is, contended that the culture of groups might be altered and alienation forestalled by manipulating the social and physical environment, a bracing notion for persons concerned with cancerous slums, inevitable conflicts among groups outside the slums, and the maintenance of the culture and civic morale of groups everywhere in the city. From this perspective the comprehensive planners insisted on two items. They contended that experts in urban life and culture should work under governmental auspices and through governmental agencies to produce for all parts and groups in the city a single master plan, a document containing detailed, long-term recommendations for changes in the social and physical environment designed to implement the cosmopolitan project. And they argued that the chief guardian of the master plan should be a strong planning commission that would negotiate disputes over the implementation of particular public and private development proposals by working out settlements that did not endanger the cosmopolitan project.³

Ironically, the cosmopolitanizing comprehensive planners sought to inaugurate a new era of intergroup understanding, cooperation, and conflict-free urban life by more thoroughly segregating the city geographically by class and race. Comprehensive plans, that is, focused on the construction of carefully crafted, regulated, and homogeneous neighborhoods, including sometimes the creation of new ones on tracts cleared of slums in the inner city. The planners promoted territorial segregation by race and class to advance the cosmopolitan agenda in two ways. They wanted to separate the cultural groups to keep the peace
among them and to assign them to physical and social environments designed to promote intragroup coherence. Under these conditions, the planners felt, other governmental and civic agencies could foster trait-sharing by orchestrating discretely managed intergroup contacts in the city's social, recreational, and political life.

Attempts to realize this vision in Cincinnati earned it a reputation as one of the nation's best governed cities and produced several programs that classified Over-the-Rhine as a slum and proposed to eliminate it. These consisted of a comprehensive zoning scheme adopted in 1924 that targeted Over-the-Rhine for commercial and industrial but not residential land uses, a master plan in 1925 intended to assure that outcome, a design in the 1930s to clear part of Over-the-Rhine for a community development public housing project, and another comprehensive plan in 1948 that called for the clearance of all the city's slums, including Over-the-Rhine, and the construction in Over-the-Rhine of three community building public housing projects. This plan also sought in two ways to protect the new Over-the-Rhine housing projects from succumbing to blight and the spread of slums. It proposed to subject nearby slum neighborhoods to clearance and redevelopment with either public or privately financed and managed community development housing and to apply to nearby blighted neighborhoods conservation and rehabilitation treatments to forestall the inevitable day when they too would become slums and qualify for clearance and redevelopment. The failure of this program led to a rethinking of the nature of the metropolis problem that pushed the city in a new direction in dealing with these (and other) neighborhoods during the 1950s.