Cincinnati officials put off the conversion of Over-the-Rhine into a chic neighborhood in favor of starting the downtown renaissance with redevelopment projects in the central business district, a delay that permitted neighborhood activists to envision a double-barreled alternative treatment for Over-the-Rhine, designated by some as "community action." Advocates of this new approach to social work proposed the creation of new social agencies in the neighborhood and the overhaul of established ones to make them more sensitive to the way their clients defined and wanted to solve their problems. At the same time, African American neighborhood organizers in the West End persuaded city officials to include poor people in comprehensive planning processes to promote ethnic pride and coherence as a means of revitalizing particular inner-city neighborhoods and their poor residents. The first application of these ideas in the West End suggested the utility of historic preservation techniques for revitalizing neighborhoods through community action programs for the inner city. The second produced an urban redevelopment plan that linked the future of the West End with an "Appalachian" Over-the-Rhine.

The invention of community action flowed from a transformation in social theory. In the 1950s, social workers, like city planners, rejected the
idea of socially determined cultural groups that had dominated their past practices in favor of the idea that individuals should define their own cultures and life styles, a notion that proposed a new respect for the choices of clients about how and where to live. This idea also suggested that a slum need not be an environment that entrapped and demoralized its inhabitants, but could be a place that could serve either as a staging ground for mobility or as a residential location chosen by people because it fit their self-defined needs, including cheap housing, social welfare and recreational services, and appropriate jobs. Indeed, this conceptualization of the possibilities of human choice implied that slums, previously regarded as the inevitable result of community reorganization in the metropolis, could be eliminated.

This approach to social work in the inner city came to Over-the-Rhine in 1959 when the Community Health and Welfare Council, the administrative arm of the Community Chest, undertook an assessment of the impact of urban renewal and expressway programs on the delivery of recreational services to individuals in the basin. In this study the social workers, like contemporaneous city planners, abandoned their old idea of the basin as a separate entity and redefined the area as a series of distinct neighborhoods with different needs. The problem now was not what to do about the basin, but how to develop programs to meet the self-identified needs of the residents of distinctive neighborhoods within it.

While figuring this out the social workers prepared a report on the use of leisure time by basin residents that defined a new role for community centers. Such facilities, the report stated, should function not only as providers of recreational and other social services but also as critical links between residents and city agencies engaged in developing plans for neighborhood revitalization and stabilization. The report also suggested the creation of a citywide agency to coordinate the process of working with people at the neighborhood level and described its chief function as developing "a pool of . . . leadership skilled in group social work and community organization" for the purpose of helping residents define the kind of neighborhood they wanted.

But in which neighborhoods should this work start? To answer the question the Community Health and Welfare Council constructed in 1962 what it called a "Problem Index," a table that ranked Over-the-Rhine third highest among all thirty-three neighborhoods in the city on
the basis of its poverty, criminal, and infant mortality statistics. The Council described Over-the-Rhine as "one of the highest delinquency and crime areas of the city" and also indicated that it lacked community centers and organizers to help residents play a vital role in planning for the rehabilitation of themselves and their neighborhoods.

Two years before the passage of the federal Economic Opportunity Act, then, Cincinnati's social work administrators had established the principles of community organizing for neighborhood autonomy as the linchpin of their social welfare programs and had identified Over-the-Rhine as one of the city's neediest neighborhoods, one of several pockets of poverty. Not surprisingly, such an identification attracted community organizers to Over-the-Rhine, particularly those who saw it as a neighborhood chosen as a place to live by a large number of migrant southern mountaineers who seemed somehow different from other poor people. In their thinking about Appalachians in Over-the-Rhine as a peculiar people, social workers rejected the conventional explanation of the relationship of migrant groups to American society and constructed a new definition of ethnicity.

Between 1915 and 1950 students of the problem of diversity in American culture defined ethnicity as a socially determined group identification based on place of origin. In the 1950s, however, leading participants in the revolt against determinism began to label culture as an identification defined and freely chosen by autonomous individuals. A classic form of the argument appeared in Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* (1952), which examined immigration and its consequences for migrants. The decision to migrate, Handlin suggested, itself signified a self-conscious choice to break with old ways, and the process of moving disrupted the peasant society of face-to-face relationships embodied in church, village, and family and left traditional institutions, ideas, and behavior in disarray. As migrants settled in the United States, according to Handlin, they decided to reorganize themselves into groups according to their national origins, to establish voluntary associations, and to cluster together in inner-city neighborhoods. None of these associations or neighborhoods lasted long, however, because the fluidity of American society offered choices to immigrants through which they continually reconstituted their identities and institutions in new forms as they learned to negotiate their way in American society. Through this process of immigration, Handlin wrote,
particular migrants learned “what it was to be an individual, a man apart from place or station,” and in the process they came to know “what was essential in the situation of Americans.”

Handlin’s designation of self-definition as the critical ingredient of ethnic identity played a role both in the more general revolt against social determinism and in that aspect of it that took shape in the 1940s and 1950s as Cincinnatians discovered mountain people in their midst and defined them as social problems. This began as early as 1941, when a report from the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County suggested that the migration of southern whites into some of Cincinnati’s neighborhoods had resulted in decreased use of library services in those neighborhoods and in excessive book loss. Alarmed by the Detroit race riot of 1943, moreover, the Community Chest’s Division of Negro Welfare investigated intergroup relations in the Queen City and suggested that whites from the “hill sections of Kentucky [and] Tennessee” brought with them “southern racial prejudices” that contributed to racial tensions in Cincinnati. In 1944 six pastors from the West End issued a joint statement calling on parishioners to practice a “Christ-like neighborliness toward both . . . mountaineer and Negro neighbors,” a statement that also defined Appalachians as outsiders whose behavior and attitudes might create serious social problems.

During the next several years, the Appalachian migration to Cincinnati and concern over the presence of mountaineers in the city intensified, prompting social workers, clergy, teachers, and other public officials to hold in 1954 a conference to consider how to work effectively with them. In the opening address, sociologist Roscoe Giffin of Berea College in Kentucky described Cincinnati’s mountaineers as temporary victims of an archaic culture who would eventually become successful city dwellers. This point of view rested on an understanding of the migration from the mountains as simply a domestic variant of the Handlin-esque process that had brought millions of European immigrants to America’s cities as part of their self-conscious rejection of traditional peasant culture and their movement to urban modernity.

Giffin, like Handlin, argued that mountain migrants brought with them some customs and habits that would slow but not obstruct their progress toward becoming independent and choice-making urbanites
with a knack for forging their own identities and life styles. He contended, for example, that mountain living had isolated mountaineers from modern economic and social developments. Whereas modern Americans relied on the school system to transmit "important knowledge and behavior patterns," he said, mountain people carried a tradition that "considers a little 'readin' and writin' the goal of formal education." In addition, Giffin claimed that mountaineers reacted with indifference or suspicion to modern medical practices and eschewed thriftiness and financial planning. Giffin also described mountaineers as "familist" or kin-centered, implying that they lacked the drive and the means to create institutional networks for the purpose of urban survival. And Giffin stressed their religious fundamentalism, a trait, he argued, that encouraged the acceptance of poverty as "evidence of virtue and assurance of eternal salvation," discounted the importance of achievement in the present, and discouraged initiatives for overcoming poverty, ignorance, or disease.¹³

Yet Giffin remained optimistic. Citing Handlin, he argued that the decision of modern mountaineers to leave an agricultural and rurally based society augured well for their future adoption of urban ways.¹⁴ The local press echoed this view, suggesting that family disruption, sporadic school attendance, excessive credit buying, and violence resembled and ran no deeper than the problems of any migrant group. The implication was that mountaineers, like Cincinnati's Germans before them, would eventually devise an appropriately urban life style, with or without an ethnic component.¹⁵

Giffin's address to the 1954 workshop, along with a summary of the proceedings, appeared in pamphlet form and circulated among social workers, clergy, city planners, and other public officials, who by the early 1960s advocated the adoption of policies that would help mountaineers make the expected transition from peasant migrant to modern American urban dweller by empowering them to define their own life styles. Giffin, for example, advised social workers to "implant the motivations and behavior which go with formal education, dependable work habits, maintenance and improvement of housing conditions, more realistic use of cash income, and sharing in community responsibilities which accompany urban living."¹⁶ Others added that enlightened social workers—
understanding the culture of mountain folk and avoiding judgmentalism—would secure their cooperation in broadening their scope of lifestyle choices.17

The belief that the transition from peasant migrant to urban citizen would ultimately occur among Cincinnati's mountaineers comforted social theorists. But the recognition that some Appalachians faced difficulties in adjusting resulted in efforts during the late 1950s and early 1960s in Over-the-Rhine to ease their transition to urban living.18 In 1957, for example, the Appalachian Fund, a local philanthropic organization, hired a social worker to serve as a "curbside counselor" to Appalachians in Over-the-Rhine, an arrangement institutionalized in 1962 at Emmanuel Community Center on Race Street.19 In addition, the Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee established in 1963 the Council on Appalachian Migration, a group of social workers and volunteers who sought to educate Cincinnatians about newcomers from the mountains by distributing educational materials, organizing a speakers bureau, and participating in radio and television interviews.20

The Roman Catholic Church joined this effort to help migrants adjust by reversing its policy, adopted in the 1940s, of gradually abandoning Over-the-Rhine and instead began to expand its presence as the provider of yet another lifestyle choice. In 1962, for example, the archbishop designated St. Mary's parish, an immigrant church established in the 1840s in the heart of Over-the-Rhine, as a special place where newcomers, including Germans, Hungarians, and Cubans, could hear masses offered in their native tongues. Two years later students from Mount St. Mary's seminary started Catholic community organizing activities in Over-the-Rhine by opening a social and recreation center for Appalachian children and adults called the Main Street Bible Center. The seminarians soon engaged an Appalachian social worker, Ernie Myatt, to supervise a block-by-block home visitation team that asked mountain migrants about their problems and helped them find assistance in mitigating them. The staff members also organized a summer camp for Appalachians and worked with migrant juvenile offenders in a rehabilitation program.21

At this juncture developments in the West End turned up an ally for the Appalachian advocates in their efforts to serve Over-the-Rhine's mi-
grantee population. African American community organizers during the 1960s worked out a technique to help the poor by bolstering ethnic pride on the basis of racial residential segregation, and they indicated their willingness to assist the Appalachian advocates next door in implementing an ethnic program for their constituents. As William Mallory, president of the West End Community Council, put it in September 1966, his group would join forces with the Over-the-Rhine Community Council because "the real problems of the poor," such as substandard housing and "economic exploitation . . . by store operators, finance companies, and landlords[,] . . . transcend racial consideration."

The West Enders' ethnic technique for helping the poor consisted of the use of a historic black neighborhood as a center around which to build ethnic pride and as a special place of residence for people who had moved out, involuntarily or otherwise, as well as those who remained on the site. The development of this technique began inauspiciously in January 1964 with a routine review by the Planning Commission of a proposed sale of city property for the construction of a gasoline service station in the West End just as a few blocks from Over-the-Rhine. After hearing the objections of Maurice McCrackin, the minister of the West Cincinnati-St. Barnabas Church, the Commission tabled the matter and directed its staff to reconsider the sale and study the possibility of rezoning the area.

The staff response to this directive extended the scope of the discussion significantly by raising historic preservation as a potential tool in neighborhood revitalization. The report cited several assets of the neighborhood, including schools, churches, and a burgeoning network of community organizations under the auspices of the West End Community Council. And it rated a two-block stretch of Dayton Street between Linn Street and Freeman Avenue as the neighborhood's "most outstanding physical asset" because it contained some forty mid-nineteenth-century three-story structures, including stone-front townhouses with iron fences that once housed the families of Cincinnati's millionaire meat-packers and beer brewers.

The staff asserted that these assets could be preserved and strengthened and the neighborhood revitalized as a residential area if the city dropped its emphasis on industrial redevelopment in the area. The new
approach would require a moratorium on slum clearance and the application of conservation and rehabilitation techniques, including the adoption of a “realistic” zoning program to acknowledge existing industrial uses while designating the bulk of the area for residential uses. In addition, the staff thought that efforts to limit traffic and to concentrate such municipal services as rodent control, trash collection, and street sweeping would stimulate private investment in the area. Private improvements in the future could be accelerated by investing public funds in spot clearance and in an advisory service for landlords and developers similar to the one devised for the Avondale-Corryville urban renewal program.25

This report offered a new lease on life for the Dayton-Findlay neighborhood and gave both neighborhood residents and outsiders a chance to enter the debate about neighborhood revitalization. The outsiders consisted of historic preservationists, who now pressed hard for assistance from city council in preserving Dayton Street from the wrecker’s ball. Representatives of the predominantly black neighborhood expressed distrust for the preservationists, but city council nonetheless requested the Planning Commission to prepare a report on maintaining Dayton Street as a historical and architectural asset under provisions of the city’s historic preservation enabling legislation,26 which included measures for the designation of protected areas and established an Architectural Board of Review to administer design regulations established by separate legislation for each protected area.27

The Dayton Street protection area study followed the new tendency to see the basin as a composite of distinctive neighborhoods. Like the Avondale and Corryville plans in the late 1950s, this study sought to establish the neighborhood’s character by presenting a brief “historic background” that linked Dayton Street with the “grand era of the late nineteenth century,” a period in which pork-packing and brewing magnates constituted the business elite of the Queen City.28 On that basis the report proposed the adoption of a protection area ordinance for Dayton Street, a step taken by the Planning Commission after it amended the law to increase the membership of the Architectural Board from six to seven persons. The amendment had been requested by the Dayton Street Community Club so that a representative of a particular protected area
could vote on matters pertaining to that area. The Dayton Street ordinance also sought to take into account the status of the Dayton-Findlay area as a poverty neighborhood by permitting “normal” maintenance if the property owner could not within one year secure financial assistance to carry out more expensive alterations recommended by the Architectural Board.  

The new approach to Dayton Street saved one chunk of African American turf in the West End. The next step in the process launched the drive to include Dayton Street in a larger revitalized black neighborhood that could serve as a center around which to build ethnic consciousness and pride. The effort began when West End community organizers expressed fears that the city might construct in the Dayton Street neighborhood additional off-street parking for Crosley Field, then the home of the Cincinnati Reds professional baseball team. As part of the protest the community organizers established another neighborhood association, the Queensgate Community Club, in a section of the West End south of Dayton Street. This organizing campaign gathered momentum and attracted attention outside the neighborhood in 1966 when the city applied to the federal government for a survey and planning grant for an urban renewal project to assist in the construction of a new baseball stadium just outside of the territory represented by the Queensgate Community Club. The West End Community Council vigorously opposed the idea, and to placate the group the city manager appointed a broad-based West End Task Force to survey conditions in the West End and to prepare a plan for a residential urban renewal project in the area.

West End residents and their advocates dominated the Task Force, which began its work by rejecting the stadium idea and insisting on the writing of a comprehensive plan for the Queensgate II area, a 117-acre tract that bordered Over-the-Rhine on its northeastern side and the central business district to the south of Over-the-Rhine. To handle the planning process, the city government used federal funds to hire as a consultant the University of Cincinnati, which established a team of social scientists and planners to submit alternatives to the West End Task Force. The Task Force then molded the suggestions into one scheme for submission to the Planning Commission and city council.

Although contentious, the process yielded a policy plan adopted by
city council in September 1970. The plan asserted that the West End and Queensgate II had been since the late nineteenth century a “lively” African American ghetto, the home of people with a variety of occupational, religious, class, and institutional affiliations and therefore well equipped to make their own life-style choices, including either the pursuit of socio-economic and geographic mobility or the forging of ties in the ghetto. That same analysis contended that slum clearance and public housing in the 1930s and 1940s and expressway construction and urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s had displaced many blacks and their institutions, reduced cultural, economic, social, and educational opportunities in Queensgate II, and cut the area off from the larger neighborhood and converted it into an isolated enclave of poor individuals who lacked the opportunity but still possessed the will to choose what they might become.33

To remedy this situation, the Queensgate II plan called for the razing of Queensgate II and the development of 2,000 low- to moderate- and medium-income housing units for 6,000 people, with the first choice of dwellings to be reserved for current and former residents of the area.34 The plan also featured a town center next to Over-the-Rhine containing housing, shops, businesses, social service agencies, a plaza, commercial recreation facilities, restaurants, and an African American and possibly an Appalachian cultural center; a parking garage for 5,000 vehicles next to the town center; a pedestrian bridge running from the town center across Central Parkway into Music Hall; an expanded gymnasium and athletic field at Taft High School; a baseball diamond; new industry north of the neighborhood to provide employment for residents of Queensgate II and the rest of the West End; partially subsidized housing in Garfield Park; and a plaza directly east of the city hall building for civic events and festivities.

As some of these features of the Queensgate II plan suggest, it aimed not merely to create an ethnic enclave as a source of ethnic identity and strength but also to link Queensgate II and its residents more effectively to the rest of the West End, to Over-the-Rhine, to the central business district, and to the metropolitan area. The town center was expected to attract and serve people from all over the metropolitan area who might want to browse through its ethnic businesses and shops and the African American and Appalachian heritage centers. Other facilities aimed at
the same goal. The pedestrian bridge, for example, was seen as a way of stimulating a two-way flow of people between the town center and Music Hall, Washington Park, and the rest of the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood.35

The mayor and both metropolitan daily newspapers applauded the Queensgate II plan, and for a time it seemed that it might become reality.36 The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had reserved funds for its implementation, and the city's Department of Urban Renewal in August 1970 drafted implementation proposals indicating the level of city expenditures and the phasing in of federal support through HUD's Neighborhood Development Program. The plan was never wholly implemented, however, largely because the Nixon administration substantially reduced its financial commitments to such projects and adopted a racially desegregationist residential policy for the dispersal of low-income housing.37

Nonetheless, black community organizers had demonstrated a technique for fighting poverty by building ethnic pride through a program to reestablish and gild a once lively ghetto as the keystone of a larger ethnic separatist movement, a remarkable achievement for a previously powerless enclave of poor people. Some West End black activists attributed their influence to their discovery that influential whites feared confrontational blacks and could be intimidated by aggressive tactics.38 But blacks also monopolized the West End turf, ran the only community organization in Queensgate II, and possessed allies in the Dayton-Findlay neighborhood, in other black neighborhoods outside the West End, and among sympathetic whites. They also could draw on a long history of black urban experience in Cincinnati, a history that stretched back into the early nineteenth century and that stressed and dramatized not only the persistence of blacks' oppression but also their endurance and their success in building a lively early-twentieth-century ghetto. That same history produced black heroes to be used as role models and a stock of "sacred" ethnic places for inspiration. Indeed, the history portrayed the inner-city ghetto as the historic source of black ethnic strength and coherence.39 It also suggested that blacks were by historic right the inheritors of a piece of the latter-twentieth-century inner city, which could be seen as a strategic location deserving revitalization because it bordered
the central business district, still regarded as the heart of the metropolitan area by the white "power structure."

Finally, events in the West End during the mid- and late 1960s suggested a distinctive and critical role for community councils as the defenders of the general welfare of the territory over which they claimed jurisdiction. During the period of the development of the Queensgate II plan, the West End Community Council identified and defined problems in the West End and assigned priorities for their resolution, in this case placing the redevelopment of Queensgate II at the top of the community's agenda. Thus the Council ordained and supported the activities of various groups, organized and otherwise, within the West End, successfully managing the tendency toward neighborhood parochialism.

By the late 1960s, then, a definition of Over-the-Rhine as a neighborhood inhabited by Appalachian migrants had taken hold and West End activists had pointed the Appalachian advocates to ethnic pride as a way to combat poverty. Indeed, some Over-the-Rhine activists had already taken steps to establish the area as an enclave for Appalachians only. It remained to be seen whether they could match their black counterparts in organizational skill and ideological finesse as they strove to prevent Over-the-Rhine from becoming either a chic downtown neighborhood or another part of the city's growing black ghetto.