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**Sculpted Places: Identity, Community, and the Cleveland Cultural Gardens**

**Reading Notes:**
This is an initial draft of an 80,000 word monograph that will focus on the cultural gardens. However, this study will reach beyond the gardens to incorporate (strategically) other elements of the region’s public arts, landmarks, “environment,” and vernacular architecture. Ultimately, it will explore how vernacular spaces reveal shifting and ephemeral histories of place and identity in cities during the twentieth century, using our region as a case study.

I gave this paper to the Urban History Association Annual Conference, in the context of a panel titled: “Constructed Spaces: Public Art and American Urban Life in the 20th Century.”

By the way, I should also note that this research is being built, in part, out of my broader work with students and in-service teachers. For a reminder of some of those pieces of this project which are either complete, or “in process,” see the following: 1) the sound portraits that were part of WCPN’s *Accents* programming, [http://www.wcpn.org/accents/feature.html](http://www.wcpn.org/accents/feature.html); an issues of *Crooked River* is being built, [http://academic.csuohio.edu/clevelandhistory/culturalgardens/](http://academic.csuohio.edu/clevelandhistory/culturalgardens/).
A Good Laugh

When I was preparing to make the Cleveland Cultural Gardens the focus of a regional history course, my colleague David Goldberg graciously gave me a tour of them. As we walked through the shaded spaces on a warm summer day, we stopped to relax on the lower level of the Italian Garden. We listened to the gurgling of the fountain and stared up at the mezzanine that recalled the grandeur of ancient Rome. “Mussolini visited Cleveland late in the 1930s,” David related. “In fact, he addressed an enthusiastic crowd of Italian immigrants from that mezzanine.” As he spoke, my jaw dropped; David had my attention. Then, suddenly, he stopped and smiled. Apparently, Mussolini had never traveled to Cleveland, much less the gardens. We had a good laugh together, but it turned out that I would have the last laugh. Mussolini’s influence was written into the landscape. He donated a column from the Roman Forum as well as a bust of Virgil that both stand prominently in the gardens; Cleveland’s Italian community did a fund-raising tour of fascist Italy in the 1930s and made Mussolini a lifetime member of their association; and, at the dedication of the Italian Garden, the fascist salute so common in Rome was in much evidence.¹

The gardens are exceptional in many regards and reveal an interesting perspective through which to consider the complicated relationship between communities, public art, and urban landscapes. Begun in 1926, the Cleveland Cultural Gardens is a collection of formal spaces featuring mixed artworks (mostly sculpture), landscape architecture, and organic arrangements in a filament-thin park that juts out in perpendicular fashion from Lake Erie on Cleveland’s East Side. Often referred to as a singular entity, these grounds are actually more than twenty independently designed gardens sculpted by prominent architects, landscape designers, and artists. They were built at the impetus of a varied assortment of the region’s ethnic
and religious communities, with pieces literally constructed by local and international artisans. Funded by bake sales, foreign nations, and the WPA, the gardens reflect the influence of local, national, and international populations. Of course, by their nature gardens are not fixed entities. However, the founders of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens neither limited the boundaries of the chain nor the ability of particular organizations to add and subtract from their gardens. As a result, sculptural and landscaping elements have been changed by formal writ and informal intervention. Indeed, although decay has been the most dominant theme recently, the organizations responsible for the oversight of the complex of gardens, the Cleveland Cultural Gardens Federation and the City of Cleveland, continue to manage them actively. The gardens remain a complex and dynamic living entity, which sets them apart from many public art projects, as well as monuments and memorials particularly. Of course the gardens provide an interesting viewpoint from which to consider the history of Cleveland and its environs, but I think that we can obtain other insights as well. In particular, the gardens provide a unique lens through which to understand the interplay between people and urban public art over a sustained period of time. And, exploring the history of this dynamic public arts projects also reveals much about the nature of urban life itself—about the struggles that city dwellers faced in constructing and maintaining identities, communities, and the landscapes as the urban world of the twentieth century was changed by them, with them, and around them.

**Studying Public Art**

Public art has a broad definition, but however one chooses to define it, the development and enactment of public art projects results from complex interactions between artists and audiences, as well as institutional, geographic, and interest-based communities. These interactions have been the grist for much research. Connoisseurs have created inventories of public arts projects and shared the details of their creation. Scholars have examined the
development of public art as stories in themselves or as lenses through which we can view particular historic moments, including community values, societal power relations, and institutional structures. Other researchers have explored the issues surrounding public arts projects of a particular type or examined how particular themes—gender, race, or war—have been treated in public art. Alternately, scholars have studied how public art—especially sculptural monuments—has been reinterpreted by subsequent audiences.²

This project has been influenced by each of these approaches. However, I would contend that public art projects also must be explored as part of the broader urban framework, including the building of physical infrastructure, community life, and the definition of place.³ Just as neighborhoods, ordinary buildings, and landmarks are built, are maintained, are allowed to deteriorate, are preserved, or are razed, so too does public art in all its guises—murals, monuments, and gardens—follow a life course.⁴ For the most part, studies of public art projects have not taken this view, mostly because they have been asking different questions. In addition, the methods used by those studying public art have worked against taking such a viewpoint. Usually research on public art has focused on moments of creation or very brief cross-sectional slices of time, or they have studied a single memorial or type of memorials.⁵ I propose an approach that links the history of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens to both their surrounding landscapes and communities and taking a longitudinal perspective, following them and their reinterpretation for over 80 years. If you will, I will be developing a biography of an ongoing public art project (and this essay is a first stab at developing ideas in this vein).⁶

**Constructing Places: Growing the Cultural Gardens**

In 1926, members of a Progressive city improvement organization proposed a series of cultural gardens in Rockefeller Park, along Liberty Boulevard, that emanated from a garden that had been built in 1916 in honor of William Shakespeare. The effort to honor Shakespeare had
been part of a larger effort at beautifying the city, at creating and expanding the city’s networks of parks in a manner that would civilize its residents—especially newly arrived immigrants who had made Cleveland their home in remarkable numbers. For example, the 1920 census reported that more than one in three Cleveland residents was foreign born. Neither the bust celebrating the English playwright, nor the trees planted in honor of vegetation featured in his plays appears to have captured the imagines of the Italian, Polish, and Slovenian communities that settled in the neighborhoods contiguous to the gardens. However, the editor of the *Jewish Independent*, prominent newspaperman Leo Weidenthal, and German immigrant Charles Wolfram—both members of the Civic Progress League—imagined a way to connect Shakespeare and high cultural ideals to the region’s immigrant communities. Along with fellow ethnic elites and old-guard activists, they articulated the ideal of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens. Transforming the Civic Progress League into the Cleveland Cultural Garden League (later the Cleveland Cultural Gardens Federation), Weidenthal and Wolfram identified the organization’s mission: “to encourage friendly intercourse, to beautify city parks, to memorialize our cultural heroes, and to inculcate appreciation of our cultures.”

Within a year, in 1927, Cleveland’s City Council acknowledged the new organization and established the Cleveland Cultural Gardens. Weidenthal initiated the Hebrew Garden with the planting of three cedars from Lebanon in the garden, setting in motion the garden-building process. Other communities soon followed this lead, and by World War II, a one-mile stretch of Rockefeller Park contained nearly twenty gardens.

When building their gardens, Clevelanders constructed symbols that literally and figuratively embodied both a particular sense of community as well as their broader sense of regional and national identity. Just as planting Cedar Trees from Lebanon literally grounded the Hebrew Garden’s statement of identity to the Jewish community’s claim to Middle-Eastern lands, so too the other cultural garden organizations linked their plots of land in Rockefeller Park
to physical elements of their national heritage. For example, the Italian Garden, as revealed above, contained architectural features from Italy. Of particular note the bust of Virgil stood on a column from the Roman forum that was made of Travertino stone. Also there was a granite boulder from Monte Grappa in Italy that was donated by the Italian (World War I) Veterans of Cleveland. At the same time, it was built by local Italian stone masons who had emigrated to the United States with their trades, and who also had built much of the stone work that characterized bridges, buildings, and other architectural sites throughout Cleveland, if not the United States.\footnote{9}

In a similar vein, the local Hungarian community sought to recreate Hungary in America through its use of organic material and an ornamental iron gate that presides over the main entrance to the garden. Hawthorn, Yew, Cotoneasters, and Azaleas—plants that the Plain-Dealer reported were common to Hungarian gardens—frame the garden’s two central lawns, brick paths, and stone benches. The eighteen-foot gate that towers above the garden’s entrance was hand copied from the Szekely Kapus gate of Eastern Hungarian. It also included references to oak leaves and grape leaves, also reputed to be traditional in Hungary. More interesting were two large ginger heart shapes, such as those traded by “sweethearts in the old country”—suggesting, at least metaphorically, the complex relation between immigrants and the lands of their birth. Yet, the gate also contained a significant variation from the one on which it was modeled. It was made of wrought iron, in contrast to the tradition of wood gates, hand-painted and colored, that might commonly be seen guarding entrances to Hungarian gardens. Most critically, perhaps, this variation depended upon the skilled labor that Hungarian immigrants had brought with them to the city’s thriving iron and steel industry—at firms like National Malleable Steel Castings, the Van Dorn Iron Works.\footnote{10}

Underscoring the significance of the gardens for defining each of the constituent communities were the remarkable numbers of people who attending the opening celebrations of
the gardens in the 1930s. For example, over 60,000 Cleveland residents participated in and attended the dedication of the Hungarian Garden on a sunny July morning in 1938, watching as Clevland’s Mayor (Harold H. Burton) received the garden Municipal Judge Julius M. Kovachy. The numbers are staggering, in no small part because the census reported that 23,833 people of direct Hungarian descent lived in Cuyahoga County at that time. Just months earlier, on a cold and rainy May morning, a crowd that some estimated to be as high as 100,000 people watched the parade the marked the dedication of the Yugoslav Cultural Garden; another 35,000 attended the opening of the American Legion Peace Garden, and over 5000 witnessed the dedication of the Irish garden. Such attendance continued into the 1950s; in 1951, over 100,000 Clevelanders had attended or participated in ceremonies held in the gardens during the preceding year. Such spectacular attendance reveals the degree to which the gardens were part of the city’s cultural fabric. Cleveland residents had invested much of themselves in their gardens, which would contrast with attendance after the 1960s, when the number of visitors waned; By the 1970s, festivals rarely drew crowds of larger than 300 people.

**Negotiating Places: Cultivating Gardens and Americans**

The design of the Gardens suggested unity of vision but, in fact, it hid enormous conflict—both internationally and locally. Manifested in countless ways, the problems the gardens faced were not merely internecine group conflict but they drew from the ways that the gardeners conceived of their identities. Indeed, conflict—both local and international—played a critical role in constructing the spaces of the gardens. Although the rhetoric of brotherhood has persisted, the Cleveland Cultural Gardens have rarely been places of unity, with the very institutional and physical structure of the gardens working to diminish expressions of unity.

By participating in the Garden League, each garden organization and its community demonstrated a commitment to concord, but the process of design mitigated against unity. Each
The garden was designed separately, without a common pathway connecting the disparate spaces. Perhaps more critically, each of the gardens was structured with formal entrances and exits—which for the most part did not reference the surrounding complex of gardens. Although a path was created to link the gardens in the 1930s, the location of the path and its orientation to the gardens reveal the degree to which this connective tissue was an afterthought. Even the institutional structure of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens Federation, with its poorly-defined relationship to the City of Cleveland, undermined the creation of a common order. From the outset, the weak central body had difficulty managing the organizations that sponsored each of the gardens, and it had little external influence.\(^\text{15}\)

In addition, the gardens often have incorporated symbolism or design elements that subverted the message of unity and reflected ethnic tensions in Europe and Cleveland. Clever choices of sculpture and honorees by ethnic communities also brought the conflicts so evident in Europe and its history to the chain of gardens. For example, Rusins in Cleveland (whose roots can be traced to Eastern Europe) honored Alexander Duchnovich who wrote the Rusin national anthem and defended the Rusin language from Hungarian rule in the nineteenth century. Both the Slovak and Czech gardens celebrated similar themes; it was no mistake that the Czech, Slovak, and Rusin gardens were arrayed themselves across a boundary street from the contiguous German and Hungarian gardens, suggesting how powerfully old cultural conflicts were felt.\(^\text{16}\)

The manner in which the Cultural Garden League and ethnic Clevelanders represented their identities in 1939 at the dedication of the American Legion Peace Garden revealed much about the limitations of their project. The Cultural Garden League argued for national identities literally tied to the soil of their homelands. One-by-one, representatives of 28 nations, deposited soil from their country into a funnel that emptied into a “Peace Crypt.” “There is something terribly real about a handful of soil,” reported one viewer.\(^\text{17}\) A decade later, in honor of the
creation of the state of Israel, soil from the grave of Zionist Theodore Herzl was added to the soil in the crypt. By embodying identity in a handful of dirt, the Cultural Garden League argued that America was comprised of European homelands, of an organically determined and nationalistic notion of self. Intermingling the soils certainly represented an act of tolerance, but one overshadowed by the same pernicious biological sense of self that had led the march to war.

The American Legion Peace Garden revealed yet another contradiction in the make-up of the Cultural Gardens. The irony of giving veterans a prominent role in promoting peace would probably not have been lost on the members of the Cultural Gardens League, in part because war and peace had been critical to the organization’s founding. Following World War I, shortly after the construction of the Shakespeare garden and poet’s corner, the avenue around which the park was oriented, Lower East Boulevard, was renamed Liberty Boulevard. In honor of Cleveland’s war dead, trees were planted from the shore of Lake Erie to the city’s border; at the base of each tree was a bronze plaque with the name of each soldier. In building brotherhood through art and culture, the league had clearly imagined itself as part of a broader struggle to rebuild civilization and modernity in the wake of World War I. Thus, in 1935, when a representative of the League of Nations planted an American Elm tree at one entrance to the gardens and compared the work of the Cultural Garden League to the influence of the League of Nations (and declared the gardens would become the model for the grounds surrounding the League of Nations’ new palace at Geneva) members of the Cultural Garden League would have been extraordinarily proud. The war that the League of Nations failed to prevent was on everyone’s mind when the American Legion garden was dedicated on July 31, 1939, just one month before Germany unleashed a blitzkrieg across Poland, starting World War II. In the address spoke, an emissary of President Roosevelt spoke directly to the impending conflict, “ultimately (isolationism) will lead to a militarized America and destruction of our classic pattern of a democratic republic of
peace.” If it was somewhat contradictory in terms of the Cultural Garden League’s mission to allow the American Legion to host a garden, the choice augured the future of this unique place.20

Indeed, war reframed the Cultural Gardens. The bombing of Pearl Harbor brought the war to America. The Cultural Gardens Federation debated the best course of action for the organization and the gardens. How exactly does one demonstrate ethnic pride and “Americanism” at the same time? The answer quickly became evident as the League passed a resolution to “discontinue all public celebrations and demonstrations in behalf of our respective nationality gardens for the duration of the war.” As members of the federation debated about what it meant to be “patriotic,” they eventually loosened restrictions on holding public events in the gardens but determined that “none but the American flag be displayed on these occasions.” As American identity was being forged in entirely new ways by the war effort, the spaces of the gardens too were being redefined.21

The onset of the Cold War accelerated the redefinition of the gardens, transforming these urban oases into places through which Clevelanders would wage the battle for American democracy. In 1946, as the Cold War had begun to brew, the Cultural Gardens Federation inaugurated the first festival that involved its entire membership—One World Day. Held in conjunction with Cleveland’s Sesquicentennial, One World Day represented a significant new direction for the cultural gardens. For the first time, the rhetorical unity of the Cultural Gardens Federation was manifest in a common ritual. The emphasis on peace, brotherhood, and diversity became subservient to the primacy of the cultural gardens as a place that represented distinctly American (and sometimes even militaristic) values.22 As the Cold War intensified, the cultural gardens ceased being places in which communities gathered and through which they express expressed distinctive values. Rather, the gardens became primarily symbolic places committed to peace, brotherhood, and American nationhood—with an aggressive subtext.
With floats, parades of ethnic costumes, dancing and music, One World Day was a pastiche of ethnic demonstrations designed to express Americanism. One World Day provided a platform for politicians and community leaders to speak on the meaning of the gardens, stressing the importance of the melding of other cultures into one that was uniquely American, and therefore superior to all others. The focus on the disappearance of other cultures into America reflected the Cold War’s focus on defeating the communist menace, both internally and externally. One example of America-first rhetoric was Ohio’s Governor Frank Lausche’s comments before the 1952 One World Day audience, “the melding of nationalities in this country presented a strong challenge to the leaders of communism. Americans of other national origins must have a devotion to this country above that to their ancestral heritage. …While I love the songs of Slovenia, I love America better.” Likewise, the 1957 festival ended with American folk dances, a personification of the Statue of Liberty and the audience singing “America.”

The Cold War struggle also was taken up in the landscape. Nearly every statue added after World War II became a chance to reaffirm American identity, providing yet more evidence of unity against the red menace. For example, in 1954, the Hungarian Reformed Federation of American donated a bust of a prominent nineteenth-century poet and journalist, Endre Ady, who was the “conscience of the Hungarian nation.” The keynote speaker—the minister of the First Hungarian Reformed Church of Cleveland—declared, “Communists in control in Hungary today are claiming Ady as their poet; but anyone who reads his poetry, or knows anything of the man’s life, knows he would have been in the forefront of the fight against Communism.” In 1961, the Finnish Garden honored Jean Sibelius in no small part because his was had been foundational for the country’s political independence, “expressing the thoughts and hopes of the nation that could not be written due to Russian oppression,” according to Finland’s Ambassador to the United States. The Cultural Garden League even violated its ban on overtly military and political figures
by allowing a bust of Abraham Lincoln to be erected in the American Colonial Garden in 1950
and a bust of Czechoslovakia’s first president Thomas Masaryk to be placed in the Czech garden.
According to Frank Lausche, (now) a United States Senator, “The love of liberty lives strong in
the hearts of the Czechoslovakian people in America. … Our government will not make any pact
for the degradation of Czechoslovak liberty.”25

Curiously, even as the central message of the Cultural Gardens sharpened, the number of
visitors declined, suggesting that the gardens were losing their centrality of place. The change in
the relationship between communities and the gardens had not changed simply because of the
Cold War or the fever pitch of patriotism. Indeed, if urban historians tell us anything about
places and the process of defining them, it is that they are always in a state of flux. The reasons
for this decline had many causes, no the least of which was the changing composition of
Cleveland’s ethnic communities themselves. Immigration restriction acts, conceived even before
the gardens, had finally begun to choke their growth in the 1950s. The population of ethnic
Clevelanders who could tie their roots directly to Europe was declining and aging. Their children
also began to leave the old ethnic enclaves in favor of near suburban neighborhoods. Such shifts
occurred gradually but speak to the way in which the gardens had been embedded in the broader
infrastructure of region and community. As new paths cut through the city, they were arteries
that could draw visitors to the gardens or drive them away, as key founder Leo Weidenthal
recognized in the 1950s. Indeed, Liberty Boulevard, around which the gardens were woven, had
begun to shift after World War II. It was widened, speed limits were increased, and it became a
winding “speedway” where car buffs tested their wheels. Indeed, although the Cultural Garden
League had cast itself in stone and bronze, it was a place in change, transforming alongside
neighborhoods, communities, regional landscapes, economic fluctuations, and even international
geopolitical events.26
Empty Places: Decaying Gardens and Race in America

The shifting landscape of the gardens and their place in Cleveland manifested itself most dramatically in the 1960s. As the mix of the gardens’ soil literally and figuratively changed, conflict exploded to the surface as Cleveland Cultural Gardens. They became a site of racial discord, embodying the urban crises facing American cities in the 1960s. Like other northern cities, Cleveland underwent dramatic demographic shifts in the second half of the twentieth century and these conflicts that accompanied these changes would reconfigure the gardens culturally, socially, and physically. Even in 1930 as the gardens were being planted, African Americans comprised the largest single migrant group to Cleveland, and by 1960, African Americans comprised about one-third of Cleveland’s population. These shifts were especially pronounced in the communities immediately adjacent to Rockefeller Park. (See appendix 1 for brief tables.) The migration of African Americans, as well as the Civil Rights movement, changed Cleveland. Just as in other American cities, questions about the distribution of social, economic, and political power moved to the forefront. Often these tensions worked themselves out in vernacular landscapes, including Cleveland’s cultural gardens.

Initially having omitted African Americans from inclusion in the complex of gardens the Cultural Garden League (now the Cultural Gardens Federation) found itself struggling with how and whether to include African Americans in the gardens. In 1961, city councilman Leo Jackson proposed that a Negro Cultural Garden be built, but his proposal was more directed to reclaiming park space and stopping the construction of a high-rise apartment building in the neighborhood. Mayor Anthony Celebreeze supported the proposal, for which community activists agitated, but the finance committee voted the measure down. However, the effort reflected the changing Glenville and Hough neighborhoods that surrounded the gardens, and it also underscored the broader political struggle of African Americans for a place in the gardens. Russell Davis,
principal of the nearby Harry Davis Junior High, argued for building “a tribute to all the cultures and nationalities that have made Cleveland great.”

As the Hough riots exploded in the neighborhoods surrounding the gardens, racial tensions found expression in the gardens. Twenty-four sculptural pieces, including Abraham Lincoln’s bust, acquired a new sensibility when the graffiti “Get Whitey” and “Black Power” appeared on them. The Culture Gardens Federation responded with surprising aplomb, removing the graffiti and offering a measured response. Speaking at the 21st Annual One World Day on September 11, 1966, Plain Dealer publisher and editor Thomas Vail said, “The unity symbolized in the gardens is America’s contribution to a world in which nations have not yet learned to live in peace and understanding.” Vail continued, “We should be reminded that the purpose of all of us must now be directed at curing the evils that have produced racial unrest.” The vandals and their subsequent trial were given plenty of media attention (as were the black nationalist sentiments of the group’s leader), but theirs were not the first acts of racial hostility. Earlier that summer, white supremacists twice covered the park buildings and benches with “anti-Negro slogans, swastikas and KKK symbols.” The harmonious blending of cultures had become, in the words of Cleveland’s NAACP executive secretary George Livingston, “a battleground between Negro and white youths.”

The battle to carve out a space in the gardens continued even as the first explicit expression of African American identity appeared in the American (Colonial) Garden in 1970 with the dedication of a Booker T. Washington memorial in the American garden. But the monument was twice dynamited by vandals. The motivation behind the attacks, however, is unclear. Were they led by white supremacists, angered at the inclusion of an African American in a garden dedicated to American identity? Or were they the acts of African Americans angered at the selection of Washington, who was known for his dedication to the cause of “compromise,”
seen by many African Americans as an attitude of surrender towards the system of Jim Crow?\textsuperscript{30}

In the same year, Cleveland’s most influential black leader, Congressman Louis Stokes created a committee for the garden, which the Cultural Gardens Federation recognized in 1976; a four-acre plot was dedicated on October 23, 1977. However, only one plaque was created for the gardens and other plaques were created for the garden but held in storage due to an increasing fear of theft. A 1983 editorial in the Cleveland Plain-Dealer summed up the new symbolic meaning of the Gardens: “…the Cultural Gardens, intended to be a monument to an ethnically pluralistic society, have instead become a metaphor for divisiveness and hatred, segregation and racism, unfair housing and the poor relations among people that are at the root of so many urban problems.” African Americans had obtained a place in the gardens, but that place remained empty—a metaphor for their long-term struggle for political and economic rights.\textsuperscript{31}

**Conclusions**

Once a defining place of international significance in the sixth largest American city, the Cleveland Cultural Gardens had been emptied of sculpture, plants, and meaning by the end of the century. Cleveland had not become “placeless,” but how Clevelanders had defined their communities changed. Not surprisingly, Cleveland had become the locus of identity for many of Cleveland’s immigrant population and their children. In the 1990s, recently migrated Ukrainians to the region memorialized the Ukrainian famine at their church in Parma, where so many new immigrants had settled; they did not select the Cleveland Cultural Gardens as the site for this memorial. Even local ethnic museums in Cleveland, such as the Hungarian Museum, opened up shop in suburban shopping alls. Likewise, local shopping malls and suburban communities redefined their own spaces by commissioning works of public art and creating vernacular spaces in an effort to continue the process of re-orienting community. For urban dwellers the gardens had not become any more relevant.\textsuperscript{32}
Even so, like any perennial garden in winter, the Cultural Gardens had not disappeared; they had only become dormant. But questions remained about how to save this “oasis of beauty in the ghetto,” as a 1985 Cleveland Plain-Dealer expose on the gardens put it, revealing the continual racial animosity so embedded in the region’s white community. Interestingly, the solutions that most people proposed were structural in orientation, suggesting physical changes to the surrounding urban landscape. For example, Martin Luther King Boulevard (as Liberty Boulevard had been renamed in the 1980s) had become a two-lane, low-speed parkway. One-quarter of the city’s parks budget was marked for improvements in the Gardens. The presence of an African American mayor (Michael White) living on a street contiguous to the gardens led to improved police presence and community groups improved the housing stock in the neighborhood around the gardens.33

For scholars, the unique character of the gardens is instructive. Even though the unity of design suggested by the name—Cleveland Cultural Gardens—is largely a fiction, it continues to generate an important narrative of identity and place. With a varied past that touches nearly every community in Cleveland, the gardens are a combination of natural materials—some durable, such as stone sculpture or ironwork, and others seemingly less enduring, such as flowers, plants, and other organic materials. Such material realities lend themselves to a view of the gardens as part of a varied and broad urban fabric, as part of the broader and complex relationship that connects urban residents to their remade natural world. Lastly, by their very nature the gardens possess a vibrant quality rooted in their organic dynamism. Indeed, the gardens are not fixed—either individually or as a garden complex. Garden federations have continued to add (or subtract) from the sculpture, architectural, and planting elements, and additional groups have been included in the chain. And, just like most works of public art and
cities themselves—both of which connote a certain sense of permanency—the Cleveland Cultural Gardens remain a work in progress.

The Gardens suggest how public art—from the most mundane to extraordinary—has a quality similar to other aspects of the urban physical infrastructure. Just as ordinary buildings and landmark structures are built, are maintained, are allowed to deteriorate, are preserved, or are razed, so too does public art in all its guises—murals, monuments, and gardens—follow a life course. For some reason, we rarely conceive of public art in this manner. More typically, we remove such works from their broadest spatial and social contexts. Instead, we prioritize more particular and immediate contexts, seeking insights into specific communities or distinct moments of historical change. What I am suggesting here is an approach to public art that treats it more holistically as part of a broader urban center—in much the same way that we view urban infrastructure and economy.
Appendix 1  Population Tables for Cleveland

Table 1: Racial Composition, City of Cleveland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Pop.</th>
<th>White (#{%})</th>
<th>African American (#{%})</th>
<th>Other (#{%})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>900,429</td>
<td>827,090/91.8%</td>
<td>71,899/8%</td>
<td>1,440/.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>878,385</td>
<td>793,417/90.3%</td>
<td>84,504/9.7%</td>
<td>415/-%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>876,050</td>
<td>622,942/71.1%</td>
<td>250,818/28.6%</td>
<td>2,290/.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>573,822</td>
<td>307,264/53.6%</td>
<td>251,347/43.8%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Racial composition of selected census tracts surrounding the gardens.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Pop. In 3 Tracts</th>
<th>White (#{%})</th>
<th>African American (#{%})</th>
<th>Other (#{%})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>19,097</td>
<td>18,429/96.5%</td>
<td>398/2%</td>
<td>10/-%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>18,786</td>
<td>5,133/27.3%</td>
<td>13,612/72.5%</td>
<td>41/2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>10,080</td>
<td>Not reported/-%</td>
<td>9,549/94.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The figures represent the sum of three tracts abutting Rockefeller Park. Note that the tract boundaries change slightly, but not significantly. The following tracts were used for 1940 and 1960: K-9, P-4 and R-1. In 1980, I used tracts 1119, 1181 and 1186.

Table 3: “Native-born” Population, City of Cleveland*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Pop.</th>
<th>Native Born [Whites] (#{%})</th>
<th>Foreign Born [Whites] (#{%})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>900,429</td>
<td>597,603/66.4%**</td>
<td>229,487/25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>878,385</td>
<td>614,234/69.9%</td>
<td>179,183/20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>876,050</td>
<td>527,773/60.2%</td>
<td>95,247/10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>573,822</td>
<td>520,475/90.7%</td>
<td>33,347/5.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** In 1930, 39.4 percent of native whites had foreign or mixed parentage. Only 27 percent of Clevelanders came from native parents. Detailed/comparable data on parentage is not available in later Censuses.
There are a few excellent sources on the Cultural Gardens. Clara Lederer, *Their Paths are Peace* (1954); John Bodnar discusses the gardens briefly in *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), esp. 97-104; for a discussion of some of the sculptural pieces, see Richard N. Campen, *Outdoor Sculpture in Ohio* (Chagrin Falls, Oh.: West Summit Press, 1980); also the Western Reserve Historical Society holds their records which are listed here under the shorthand, WRHS, CCGF, MS 3800. On the Italian garden see, for instance, Lederer, 71-73; WRHS, CCGF, MS 3800, Box 1, Folder 3, Cultural Garden League Minutes, October 14, 1935; WRHS, CCGF, MS 3800, Box 5, Folder 2, misc. letters. Many newspaper references were taken from the newspaper morgue of the Cleveland Plain-Dealer, but they do not always list precise dates or even the newspaper where the clipping originally appeared.

For a simple, operative definition, see the definition offered by Minneapolis’s community arts network, which is a succinct statement about the contemporary public arts; <http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archive/intro-publicart.php>. This work necessarily begins with a definition of what constitutes public art is difficult because the term encompasses so much. Most obviously, and for our initial purposes, we should view it as art that is made and displayed in a public space, whether outdoors or in a building with easy public access. Most typically, we think of public art in terms of monuments or memorials; but we should recognize public arts can take other forms, such as murals and they need not have a commemorative in function. Also, if the public arts that we know best are durable, public arts projects can include less durable elements, such as landscaping (as is the case of the Cultural Gardens), rendering them changeable according to the particular site. And, in the last twenty years, public art projects have become more ephemeral, such as Christo’s “wrapped Reichstag.” This essay chooses to define public art broadly because the Cleveland Cultural Gardens are not merely monuments or memorials, but they were meant to be understood as works of art that celebrated the arts.

There is an expansive literature on public arts and historical approaches to them; this work began with an assessment of some of them, including: Michele H. Bogart’s fine essay “The Ordinary Hero Monument in Greater New York: Samuel J. Tilden’s Memorial and the Politics of Place,” *Journal of Urban History* Volume 28, No. 3 (March 2002), 267-299; Michele H. Bogart, *Public Sculpture and the Civic Ideal in New York City, 1890-1930* (Chicago, Il.: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Penny Balkin Balch, *Public Art in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1992); Harriet F. Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture: Tradition, Transformation, and Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Harriet F. Senie and Sallie Webster, *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992). One important note about all the research on this subject pertains to sources. They vary greatly depending on what we study, which is not surprising. However, it is critical to note that public art as an artistic endeavor has changed over time and can vary greatly. Public art can take many forms and a host of factors—including medium, presentational context, and institutional contexts—each of which matters when developing interpretive frames.


Lederer, 20.
9 “Arts of Hungary,” Cleveland Plain-Dealer, July 1, 1938; “Garden is Dedicated to City’s Hungarians,” Cleveland Plain-Dealer, 1938; WRHS, CCGF, MS3800, Folder 2, “Let’s Build it Now!”; Susan M. Papp, Hungarian Americans and their Communities of Cleveland (Cleveland, Oh.: Cleveland State University, 1981), 552
10 WRHS, CCGF, Container 4, Folder 6.
11 Census Data from year 1940. http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/
14 To understand the gardens’ design a visit would be instructive; also see John Grabowski, “Ideologies in Stone and Bronze: Ethnicity and Monuments, the Case of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens,” typescript manuscript, prepared for the 5th Ege University Cultural Studies Seminar, Cesme, Turkey, May 2000.
15 Bodnar, 102-103.
16 Note that when viewed from the perspective of the twenty-first century, the choice of the American Legion as the host organization for an “American” garden would seem to reveal much about American methods of expanding “civilization.” “Just Plain Soil Welds People of 28 Nations,” unidentified newspaper, July 31, 1939, Cleveland Plain Dealer Newspaper Morgue.
17 WRHS, CCGF, MS 3800, General Minutes, 1932-1952, October 21, 1949.
18 “League Emissary Plants Tree Here,” April 3, 1935, Cleveland Plain-Dealer.
19 James D. Hartshorne, “Co-Op Effort Called Way to Avoid War: Speech at Gardens Viewed as Bid for Presidential Support for Campaign,” July 31, 1939, Cleveland Plain-Dealer. Also, note the irony of war veterans as keepers of the peace and the possibilities of peace through war. How too, does this choice tie to the broader series of international events leading from WWI to WWII? Consider how the breakdown of efforts at Peace and Brotherhood occurred in part because of the failure of groups like the League of Nations but also the emergence of racial and ethnic ideologies tied literally to homelands and nations, much like what happened with the cultural gardens. Although this change is mostly at the level of metaphor, it nonetheless is related to significant changes in the gardens and their relation to Cleveland as a place.
20 See, for example, WRHS, CCGF, MC 3800, Box 1, Minutes, Cultural Garden League, December 1941, March 24, 1944; “Czech History to be Carved on Garden Wall: Stone Tablet to Record Text Compiled by Local Committed,” Sept. 26, 1938, Cleveland Plain-Dealer.
21 For example, at the first One World Day event in 1946, the German delegation contributed a float that featured General von Stueben aiding Washington (a bust to George Washington had been added in the midst of World War II) during the Revolution notably Washington. The Cultural Garden League’s prohibition on military symbols had apparently been abandoned in cases of American war heroes. WRHS, CCGF, MC 3800, Box 1, Minutes, Cultural Garden League, July 1946; “Marine General To Unveil Statue: Bust of Washington To Be Dedicated in Garden,” June 30, 1943, Cleveland Plain-Dealer.
22 Cleveland Plain-Dealer, August 4, 1952. CHECK QUOTE
24 See, for example, “Bust of Ady, Hungarian Poet, Will Be Erected in Garden,” September 8, 1952, Cleveland Plain-Dealer; “Busts of Two Patriarchs of Finland Unveiled Here,” September 18, 1961, Cleveland Plain-Dealer; “Masaryk Statue Dedicated,” June 4, 1962, Cleveland Plain-Dealer.
25 Accents Oral History Project, Interview with Bud Weidenthal at Cuyahoga Community College, November 2002; interviewed by Mark Tebeau; many subjects in the Accents Oral History Project reported their experiences driving on Liberty Boulevard; CENSU DATA.
27 “Undivided World Grows in Gardens, Says Vail,” Plain Dealer, September 12, 1966. Note that Vail calls for an end to racial unrest, not racial injustice.
See, for instance, “5th Dimension Sings to Help Honor Negro,” May 10, 1969, *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*. Also note that the moniker “Colonial” was dropped completely in reports of this statue’s inclusion. WHERE ARE DYNAMITE EXAMPLES?


The Ukrainian story was related as an aside in an oral history. Accents Oral History Project, Interview with Lena Pogrebinsky at the Ukrainian Museum, October 16, 2002; interviewers: Jessica Puerta, Monica Coughlin, and Mark Tebeau; also, a report about the memorial is available in an issue of *The Ukrainian Weekly*, which is available online <http://www.ukrweekly.com/Archive/1998/319823.shtml>.