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“The Best Things in Life Are Here” in “The Mistake on the Lake”: Narratives of Decline and Renewal in Cleveland

J. Mark Souther¹

Abstract

Historians have devoted ample attention to the urban crisis, but few have explored symbolic actions to manage attitudes toward metropolitan change. In the 1980s, Cleveland, Ohio, experienced what many politicians and business and civic leaders called a “comeback.” To understand the images and narratives constructed during this intended renaissance, it is necessary to examine earlier campaigns to revivify Cleveland and its reputation. This article traces three such campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the better-known 1980s renaissance, and examines the tension between acceptance and rejection of these images and narratives. This interplay paralleled a tension between decline and renewal that has been a hallmark of the post–World War II American city.

Keywords

boosterism, urban crisis, urban image, urban renewal, Carl Stokes, Cleveland

Mayor George V. Voinovich, in his remarks at the Cleveland City Club Forum on November 9, 1984, observed, “In 1979, Cleveland was rushed to the emergency room, battered, bruised, and fighting for its life. Band-aid solutions no longer were applicable. Intensive care was necessary to save our city.” A public–private partnership had “save[d] the patient’s life,” Voinovich proclaimed, pointing to a recent quip in the *New York Daily News* that “the town once called the Mistake on the Lake is now the Comeback City.”¹ The mayor was hardly alone in seeing his election in 1979 as the watershed in Cleveland’s modern era, for numerous local and national observers had done so in the five years since Voinovich replaced his embattled mayoral predecessor Dennis Kucinich. The *Christian Science Monitor* placed City Hall at the center of Cleveland’s turnaround and cast Voinovich’s election as the end of Cleveland’s long decline. Tracing the story of two couples, all of them suburbanites born in 1953, when the city stood near its peak, the *Monitor* told how they left the Cleveland area at their first opportunity in 1971 and planned not to return after college. When Voinovich took office, however, they reconsidered and settled in new luxury apartments in downtown and in the gentrifying neighborhood of Ohio City. Fulfilling

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their longtime dream of opening a restaurant, they purchased a three-story warehouse in the industrial Flats along the Cuyahoga River—the infamous river that had caught fire two years before their departure—and opened Sammy’s. The couples’ new residence and reinvestment in the city seemed to underscore the article’s closing comment by *Cleveland Plain Dealer*’s editor Thomas Vail: “Kucinich served a great purpose, because he woke everybody up.”²

In the 1980s, civic mythmakers presented Cleveland’s recent history as a simplistic declension narrative: the “Sixth City,” whose peak population of more than 900,000 occurred in 1950 even as it relinquished its No. 6 rank to Baltimore, suffered decades of flight to the suburbs, deindustrialization, racial unrest, pollution, and inner-city decay, much like other cities in the Great Lakes region.³ Cleveland became the butt of national jokes in the dozen years after the Cuyahoga River caught fire in 1969. Finally, in this narrative, the 1978 default provided the fulcrum for George Voinovich to lift Clevelanders from despair. Yet, to make 1978 the pivot for Cleveland’s “comeback” obscures more than it reveals. The mere fact that the 1980s comeback ran out of steam in the 1990s, necessitating a more recent series of revitalization efforts, suggests the limitations of assigning too much weight to it. More accurately, the Voinovich years culminated a decades-long approach to managing the image problems that accompanied urban decline. Cleveland’s celebrated comeback appropriated and elaborated image-making and rhetorical strategies first devised on the cusp of the city’s difficult transition away from heavy industry.

Historians have devoted ample attention to the post–World War II urban crisis, but few have explored symbolic actions to manage attitudes toward metropolitan change.⁴ To better understand the comeback effort that unfolded in the late 1970s, this article also examines three earlier Cleveland comeback bids—in 1960, 1967, and 1974—in which civic leaders devised symbolic responses to perceived decline. It introduces the images and narratives they constructed, as well as the degree to which locals and outside observers “bought” them in light of their own perceptions of the city. It argues that in addition to attempting to recruit new industry, Cleveland boosters increasingly harnessed the longtime “Best Location in the Nation” slogan, developed by the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company (CEI), to a three-pronged effort to lure corporate offices, attract tourists, and convince locals that their city was worth believing in. As the urban crisis unfolded, the “Best Location” slogan rang hollow, forcing boosters to counter the competing notion of “The Mistake on the Lake” by adopting new marketing responses that emphasized Cleveland’s purported quality of life, including culture, entertainment, and recreation rather than geographical location, transportation connections, and skilled manpower. The tension between acceptance and rejection of these images and narratives paralleled a tension between decline and renewal that diminishes the usefulness of understanding modern cities as following a simple arc of growth, decline, and revitalization.⁵

Before examining the four major comeback campaigns of the post–World War II era, it is well to recount how, in the public mind, “The Best Location in the Nation” transformed into “The Mistake on the Lake.” As elsewhere, although astute observers detected warning signs even before the war, Cleveland’s urban crisis came into sharp focus in the 1950s and 1960s.⁶ Cleveland leaders hoped to strengthen the city by constructing modern rapid transit and freeway systems, rejuvenating decaying neighborhoods, and building industrial parks. In 1954, when the Cleveland Development Foundation (CDF) formed in answer to Pittsburgh’s Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Cleveland seemed poised to tackle what were still central-city problems. Yet in the absence of sufficient investment by developers, the urban renewal program fell well short of its ambitions, completing only several hundred units of new housing by the mid-1960s, while industrial parks faced indefinite delays.⁷

The nickname “The Mistake on the Lake” is erroneously assumed to stem from national publicity of the burning Cuyahoga River. Thanks to *TIME Magazine* and television comedians, the burning river became etched in the nation’s mind in 1969, nearly a decade before Cleveland’s municipal default further tarnished the city’s image.⁸ The polluted river and lake, however, only compounded the urban crisis that had been unfolding for years. The “Mistake” moniker emerged in opposition to



Figure 1. This 1948 Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company advertisement depicted Cleveland, which it dubbed “The Best Location in the Nation,” as a sprawling 1,700-square-mile metropolis stretching to the Pennsylvania state line.

Source. 1948 Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company Annual Report, Cleveland Public Library, used with permission of FirstEnergy Corporation.

a booster message launched in 1944 in an effort to assure Cleveland’s smooth resumption of a peacetime industrial economy. Conflating Cleveland with its 1,700-square-mile service area that stretched to the Pennsylvania border, CEI called the city “The Best Location in the Nation,” a reference to its situation within 500 miles of more than half the nation’s people⁹ (see Figure 1). Although rarely challenged publicly through the 1950s, CEI’s slogan began to lose its luster even on the eve of the turbulent 1960s. In confidential interviews conducted by a Western Reserve University political scientist between 1958 and 1961, several prominent civic leaders expressed disdain toward the “Best Location” slogan. City councilman John Kovacic contended that CEI’s boast meant nothing more than “selling Cleveland for CEI.”¹⁰ One real estate executive called the slogan “whistling in the dark,” while another complained that it was “endless prattling” and “purely without foundation” since CEI’s “actual developments are away from Cleveland. Planned, deliberate, and they know what they’re doing.” A local newspaperman also questioned the slogan’s validity in a city that was poorly positioned to take advantage of changes in industry, not to mention “a dull damn city” offering little reason to go downtown in the evening or on the weekend.¹¹

Erievuew: “The Mistake on the Lake”

Events in 1959 set the stage for Cleveland’s first comeback bid. In November, voters rejected a county charter to initiate metropolitan government—a reflection of deep-seated distrust between city and suburban residents. Tax-averse working-class Clevelanders simultaneously rejected the

city's plans to commit itself to \$6 million in debentures and lease two acres of the hallowed, Daniel Burnham-designed Mall for a 1,000-room Hilton hotel.¹² They also influenced county commissioners' December rejection of a downtown subway loop that many believed was critical to both downtown's future and plans to build an effective metropolitan rapid transit system.¹³ Despite the unpopularity of public remedies, Clevelanders often lamented that their city lagged as cities like Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Philadelphia made impressive strides.¹⁴ Unknown to most, even as these civic campaigns appeared doomed, CDF and the city's urban renewal chief James M. Lister were quietly planning two renewal projects calculated to recast much of the four-mile swath between downtown and University Circle, the city's cultural, educational, and medical hub at the foot of the affluent Heights suburbs to the east.¹⁵

In January 1960, CDF unveiled two urban renewal projects: Erieview, a 163-acre downtown plan, and University-Euclid, a 1,400-acre plan in University Circle and the adjacent Hough neighborhood, which was rapidly swelling with African Americans migrating from the South or displaced by nearby slum clearance. These projects increased Cleveland's urban renewal area to 6,060 acres—by far the nation's largest.¹⁶ Notwithstanding the Hough plan, Erieview immediately took center stage as an engine and symbol of a larger Cleveland revitalization. With its planned complex of modernist skyscrapers and plazas that promised, in architect I. M. Pei's words, to be Cleveland's answer to Rockefeller Center, Erieview offered the symbolic push many felt Cleveland required.¹⁷ Following voters' approval of a November bond issue to launch Erieview, many officials, business leaders, and affluent suburbanites shared Mayor Anthony J. Celebrezze's sentiment that the vote proved the city had finally escaped "self doubt and hesitancy."¹⁸ Republic Steel president Thomas F. Patton congratulated Celebrezze for his "continued and unrelenting fight to get the city off dead center."¹⁹ A local television station suggested that Erieview would "push Cleveland out of the sleepy past into a wide-awake future," adding that every household's well-being was "bound up with the fight Cleveland is making to stay alive and kicking."²⁰ Likewise, a prominent suburbanite declared that Erieview would end her embarrassment about the state of downtown compared with Detroit and Pittsburgh.²¹

If the city's growth coalition expressed high hopes publicly, however, some in its ranks privately questioned the project's efficacy. Some doubted that Erieview could remake a city whose population seemed uninterested in downtown. One *Plain Dealer* reporter privately admitted that he had real doubts about Cleveland's potential to support a vibrant downtown, hinting at the drag he believed a large contingent of ethnic whites and southern black and white migrants exerted on a city whose middle and upper classes had long since decamped to the suburbs. He believed that

the complexion of the Cleveland population generally is not the cosmopolitan type of population say that New York has, ready to go down [and] support shows, good restaurants, just travel around the streets window shopping, actually shopping and so on. It's a very heterogeneous group of people we have here; a great many people are quite clannish within their own neighborhoods. And we have a great many newcomers since the war who just don't have any status as yet or much more money than they actually need for getting along; so that they never get downtown to support any theaters or restaurants or the main stores.²²

Others felt the city's commitment to Erieview denied developers the opportunity to build outside the renewal boundaries. Albert A. Levin, a Jewish developer whose failure to win city approval for his plan to build an apartment tower on Euclid Avenue as a result of the growth coalition's determination to stymie any competing projects outside Erieview, complained to CEI's chairman Elmer Lindseth that the renewal project was to blame for the failure to pursue a "renaissance of Euclid Avenue from its present doldrums." This misguided strategy, he argued,

neglected “the street which has made Cleveland . . . the ‘Best Location in the Nation’ according to your firm.”²³ Others worried that Erieview would poach offices from older buildings on or near Euclid Avenue and thereby sap the famed retailing street’s lifeblood. Erieview opened a rift between the growth coalition, on one hand, and merchants and property owners on the other. While the latter fixated on self-preservation at a time of steepening downtown business decline, the growth coalition wanted to build a new symbol for Cleveland’s comeback, not simply protect others’ investments.²⁴

As Erieview usurped municipal attention and federal funds, it drew sharp rebuke from East Side blacks. It coincided with the rise of the civil rights movement in northern cities like Cleveland, where blacks were unwelcome downtown as residents and sealed out of the suburbs by whites’ racialized ideas about property.²⁵ Indeed, a number of white business leaders privately admitted that Erieview’s dramatic plan for thousands of apartment units was tabled out of concern that the Federal Housing Administration’s nondiscrimination policy might force the development to “go colored.”²⁶ Consigned to deteriorating neighborhoods and forced to send their children to what were essentially Jim Crow schools, African Americans were indignant.²⁷ An article in Cleveland’s black weekly *Call and Post*, titled “The Best Location in the Nation?,” pointed to Erieview as a symbol of the power of those who practiced racial exclusion. The paper’s editor W. O. Walker argued the folly of thinking Erieview could revitalize a downtown that he claimed was “dying” because of leaders’ refusal to welcome those closest at hand—blacks—who could replenish businesses depleted by white flight. More darkly, another article warned that if racial discrimination were not ended soon, “The Best Location in the Nation,” including Erieview and the white suburbs, might “run with blood.”²⁸

Nowhere in the available record did critics explicitly identify Erieview as “The Mistake on the Lake,” but their juxtaposition of CEI’s “Best Location” slogan with Erieview suggests blacks’ belief that it was a mistake to pin Cleveland’s renewal hopes next to the downtown lakefront.²⁹ The first known appearance of the moniker in the local press came when Lois Dawson of the East Side neighborhood of Glenville wrote to the editor of the *Call and Post* in 1964, weeks after a bulldozer crushed to death a white activist protesting a segregated school in Glenville. “Instead of living in the ‘Best Location in the Nation,’” Dawson wrote, “I now reside in ‘The Mistake on the Lake.’ Needless to say, I have not moved.”³⁰

Clearly Erieview, seen in the context of segregated schools and overcrowding and wholesale demolition in majority-black neighborhoods, raised the question of where to plant the seeds of Cleveland’s rebirth. Many working-class ethnic whites, especially on Cleveland’s West Side, shared African Americans’ hostility toward the project, but for different reasons. They equated a focus on Erieview with a deferral of projects closer to home, like neighborhood centers. One city councilman said his constituents in the heavily Polish 14th ward “don’t give a damn about that Erieview project downtown,” adding that if he did not sell the idea constantly, they would surely revolt against it.³¹ Another commentator speculated that Erieview and a token neighborhood conservation area on the West Side were Mayor Celebrezze’s way of appeasing ethnic whites, who saw University-Euclid (and urban renewal broadly) as a giveaway to undeserving East Side blacks.³² Whether or not Erieview was part of such calculations, it certainly robbed attention from Hough. Writing to the *Plain Dealer*, a resident of the largely black Wade Park neighborhood near University Circle complained about James Lister’s mishandling of urban renewal, arguing that if he had used University-Euclid funds to rehabilitate housing instead of acquiring land, “Cleveland would still be the ‘Best Location in the Nation’ instead of . . . ‘The Mistake on the Lake.’”³³ Ultimately, the renewal debacle, which led the federal government to withhold funding in 1966, allowed Hough conditions to worsen dramatically.³⁴ Coupled with increasing friction between blacks and police, by July 1966 this neglect sparked the Hough Riots, a fiery vote of no confidence in the growth coalition’s comeback plan.³⁵

Cleveland: NOW!—The Symbolic Value of the Nation's First Big-City Black Mayor

Out of this turmoil, Cleveland's second comeback effort emerged. Carl B. Stokes became the nation's first major-city African American mayor by a slim margin in November 1967. His campaign slogan, "I Believe in Cleveland," contrasted tellingly with the smugness of previous mayors and dire predictions by suburban challengers who established temporary residences just inside the city limits near Lakewood and Shaker Heights to mount campaigns to "save" a dying city³⁶ (see Figure 2). Seeking to unite a divided city and get it moving again in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Stokes retained a leading national publicist to devise and sell Clevelanders on a large-scale plan to tackle problems of health, welfare, housing, jobs, and economic development. Called "Cleveland: NOW!," Stokes's plan was billed as a ten-year, \$1.5 billion attack on the urban crisis. At first, Cleveland: NOW! seemed poised to deliver on the Stokes's promise of a Cleveland comeback. It tapped donations ranging from pennies saved by schoolchildren to millions given by the business community. After the city's five television stations and eight of its radio stations pooled resources to produce the Stokes administration's documentary highlighting the problems Cleveland faced, a wealthy couple from suburban Bratenahl were so moved by the documentary that they gave \$1 million to Cleveland: NOW!³⁷ Stokes's program made Fleet Slaughter, the African American owner of a popular steakhouse on the East Side, rethink his plan to relocate to Miami. Slaughter not only kept his restaurant in Cleveland but also pledged \$2,000 to Cleveland: NOW!³⁸

Because the city's problems lacked facile solutions, Cleveland: NOW! relied on highly visible projects to shape perceptions. The Stokes program installed precipitators on Municipal Light's belching smokestack, fashioned chlorinated "swimming pools" in polluted Lake Erie, operated the Santa Loop holiday downtown bus loop, and replaced more than 45,000 streetlights with new mercury bulbs so "taxpayers would see where their dollars were going."³⁹ This latter move distinguished the mayor's approach from that of his predecessor, whose token relighting demonstration on a few blocks in troubled Hough yielded to relighting University Circle following the rape and murder of a Cleveland Orchestra chorister outside Severance Hall in November 1966.⁴⁰ Indicative of downtown's symbolic value and the need to allay emergent concerns about crime and unrest, Stokes ordered GE Lucalox bulbs for main downtown streets.

Burning four times brighter than mercury bulbs, they reportedly gave Cleveland the nation's brightest downtown, a welcome distinction that restored a pride not felt since the city's recognition in 1952 as the world's best-lighted metropolitan area⁴¹ (see Figure 3). Finally, although unsuccessful, a Stokes administration federal grant application to subsidize an envisioned Gateway Center along the lakefront noted Cleveland's lack of anything comparable with San Francisco, Baltimore, and Philadelphia waterfront tourist attractions.⁴²

Writers in both the *Cleveland Press* and *Plain Dealer* agreed that, if nothing else, Stokes gave Cleveland a psychological lift and, for a change, made the city a positive topic of national conversation. Stokes made Cleveland, a city that "seldom has something to get excited about," "first in political brotherhood." Stokes pointed proudly to having taken "The Mistake on the Lake" and infused it with an "*I-Like-Cleveland* mood."⁴³ Like Erieview and University-Euclid, however, Cleveland: NOW! proved unable to maintain public confidence. Although a public school student wrote the mayor to suggest that his leadership had inspired Clevelanders to fight the city's image as the "Dump by the Lake," the city's mood changed discernibly after Cleveland's second race riot erupted in Glenville in July 1968.⁴⁴ For all the hope that Stokes symbolized and his successes in building more housing than any previous mayor, he could not overcome the urban crisis or the gloom associated with Cleveland's becoming the subject of national ridicule following the Cuyahoga River fire. Citizens' letters revealed the depth and range of continuing concerns. Clevelanders feared business abandonment, as one realtor observed, noting the steady outflow of

"It's time to believe in Cleveland."

PART OF A TALK BY STATE REPRESENTATIVE CARL B. STOKES, OPENING STOKES FOR MAYOR CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS IN THE ROCKEFELLER BUILDING ON FRIDAY, JULY 28:

My name is Carl Stokes.

I am running for mayor because I believe in Cleveland. I believe that the people of Cleveland recognize that our city needs a renaissance, a resurgence of faith in ourselves, a renewal of spirit and morale as well as a renewal of buildings and other physical facilities.

Needed: A Renaissance of Faith

I believe that the people of this city are aware that this renaissance must start with the election of a new mayor—a mayor who believes in Cleveland; a mayor who has the vision and capacity to enlist the best brains and talents of our community in a united crusade for a better Cleveland.

I believe that Cleveland has the human and financial resources to solve all of our problems; from tangled traffic and downtown decay to race relations and the crying need for job-making industrial development. From the needs of the neighborhoods to the need for port and jet age airport development.

An Army of Believers

I believe that all of the people of Cleveland, from the most bitter mother on relief to the wealthiest man in a mansion, will work together to create a better, happier community if inspired by dedicated and dynamic leadership from City Hall.

I believe that the people of Cleveland have the wisdom and decency to select a new mayor solely on the basis of personal qualifications, capacity for leadership, and willingness to consult and cooperate with anyone who can contribute to the solution of our problems—and that "anyone" includes captains of industry, clergy-

men, storekeepers, steredores, housewives, hotel managers, bushoya and bankers, labor leaders and businessmen—anyone and everyone.

There is no room in our camp for unprincipled purveyors of poisonous prejudice, for cowardly spreaders of vicious rumors, for worm-like instigators of whispering campaigns, or for unclean peddlers of bigotry and hatred.

But there is plenty of room for everyone who believes in Cleveland.

During the coming campaign, our headquarters will be the command post for thousands of volunteers who believe in Cleveland, and believe in Carl Stokes.

We will have the biggest army of volunteers that has ever participated in a Cleveland municipal election.

The People of Cleveland

Can Show the World

I believe in Cleveland. I believe that the people of Cleveland can show the world that they are capable of solving the pressing problems of a great city—that they can show the world that American cities and American civilization can survive and flourish, to the personal benefit of every man, woman, and child in the community.

This is the great challenge of the last third of the Twentieth Century. How we meet that challenge will determine the fate and future of our families, our city and our country.

It's time to believe in Cleveland.

This, then, will be the theme of the Stokes for Mayor campaign: I believe in Cleveland.

And I invite you to join me—not just in the belief of our people to make this city great—but to make that belief a reality.

Stokes for Mayor Committee,
Gladstone Williams, Secretary,
210 E. 11th Street

Figure 2. Stokes for Mayor Committee advertisement.

Source. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 28, 1967.

industrial jobs from the city.⁴⁵ In addition, many whites complained that Cleveland: NOW!, like the city's earlier urban renewal agenda, focused too much on developing downtown and assisting East Side blacks. One housewife in the heavily Slovenian neighborhood of northeastern Cleveland, oblivious to Stokes's record of building slightly more new affordable housing in the city in three years than had been constructed in the previous fourteen years of urban renewal, asked a local reporter, "What improvements has [Cleveland: NOW!] made? How have all those tall buildings downtown helped anyone, colored or white?" A West Side railroad fireman complained that all Cleveland: NOW! signs were on East Side lawns, leading the same reporter to conclude, "To this young man, [Cleveland: NOW!] is for Negroes only, though in his frankness



Figure 3. This City of Cleveland advertisement implied that downtown was safe and tried to persuade Clevelanders to rediscover the pleasure of downtown shopping.
Source. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 29, 1969.

he used different terms to describe them.” As one city councilman complained of the East Side, “They ought to have a utopia out there by now, but they still have high crime statistics.”⁴⁶

By 1969, concerns about crime and disorder were legion. For example, a leading downtown jeweler refused to renew his pledge to Cleveland: NOW!, citing Stokes’s failure to curb downtown robberies.⁴⁷ City councilman and perennial mayoral hopeful Ralph J. Perk, a son of Czech immigrants to Cleveland’s Karlin neighborhood, took aim at Cleveland: NOW! in his effort to unseat Stokes. Exploiting ethnic whites’ hostility toward African Americans, he contended that East Side crime was destroying downtown Cleveland: “Watch for the iron grilles on the store windows. The few people you see on the streets are walking with fear . . . This is Cleveland: NOW!” If left unchecked, he warned, crime (and implicitly racial integration) “will leap across the Cuyahoga River to the West Side like a tidal wave.”⁴⁸ In a separate campaign statement, Perk painted a mental picture of families “imprisoned in their homes at night for fear of going out” and white-collar workers who hurried

to get out of the downtown area before dark . . . *Cleveland Now* is known as a city to stay away from . . . Has anyone been saying for the last year or so that Cleveland is “The Best Location in the Nation?” No they have not. Or if they are saying it, they are saying it in a whisper. Cleveland, the city of fear and lawlessness, is no longer a good place to live.⁴⁹

Coupled with the city’s benighted national reputation, these concerns contributed to a widening application of the derisive nickname “The Mistake on the Lake” by the 1970s. After the burning

river embarrassment, according to one story, an Eastern Air Lines pilot welcomed his passengers to “the Mistake on the Lake.” A suburban Clevelander also used the term as he decried *National Geographic*’s three-page panorama of the “inflammable Cuyahoga River.”⁵⁰

“The Best Things in Life Are Here”: The Quality-of-Life Argument

Even before the river burned, the urban crisis brought a reorganization of Cleveland’s chamber of commerce, which adopted the name Greater Cleveland Growth Association in 1968. Anxious to recast Cleveland’s image at a time when the lower land and labor costs, attractive tax abatements, and warmer climate of the Sun Belt belied any lingering notion of the Great Lakes region’s advantages for industry, the Growth Association launched the “Best Things in Life Are Here” campaign, the city’s third comeback effort, in 1974. Aimed at preserving Cleveland’s No. 3 ranking, behind New York and Chicago, as a Fortune 500 headquarters city, the “Best Things” campaign was a discursive shift away from the conflicting “Best Location” and “Mistake” identities. In the largest city promotional campaign ever to appear in *New York Times Magazine*, nine full-page ads targeted big-city executives who often based choices about office or plant locations as much on quality-of-life considerations as economic ones.⁵¹ The city itself seldom appeared in seven ads that focused on the Cleveland lifestyle. Showing a businessman, briefcase at his side, stooping to greet his young daughter on the doorstep of their suburban home, one ad boasted that “most folks out in the suburbs are only eight or nine miles from downtown.” Another pictured a man, bucket hat over his eyes and English setter at his side, lounging under a tree by a serene brook. It tallied 18,000 acres of parkland, nearly all in the Metropolitan Parks system, ten or more miles from downtown (see Figure 4). Other ads focused on education, health care, University Circle, and the city’s “melting pot of foods, languages, lifestyles and values,” which enabled kids to “grow up understanding, liking and prizing those who enrich our lives because of their differences.” However, at a time when Cleveland remained one of the nation’s most racially segregated metropolitan areas, this was at best a hopeful message.⁵²

After abandoning its “Best Location” slogan amid the unresolved urban crisis and environmentalist challenges, the CEI took cues from the “Best Things” campaign. In 1977, CEI published a color booklet titled *Quality of Living in Cleveland-Northeast Ohio*, which described Cleveland as 1,700 square miles on the shore of Lake Erie and as enjoying “pleasant suburbs.” The booklet’s cover cutaway in the shape of a leaf revealed a colorful frontispiece that showed a picnicking family enveloped by autumnal nature. Heavy on cultural and recreational amenities, the booklet featured the perspectives of eight Clevelanders, including seven business or institutional executives. The outlier was an African American school psychologist in the well-regarded suburban Beachwood public schools, whose inclusion was surely calculated to deflect attention from the contentious atmosphere surrounding a recent federal court order to remedy Cleveland’s racially segregated schools through busing.⁵³

In addition to its national ad drive extolling cultural and recreational amenities, the Growth Association’s campaign tailored its message to locals discouraged by the Erieview failure, Stokes’s inability to deliver Cleveland from the urban crisis, and the descent of the city’s reputation to a par with Detroit, Gary, or Newark. It recorded a new song named for the “Best Things” slogan that aired frequently on local television stations, even inviting Clevelanders downtown to sing the song.⁵⁴ Unlike Stokes’s *Cleveland: NOW!*, which attempted to bridge the growing gap between city dwellers and suburbanites, the “Best Things” campaign cast its message beyond the city limits. Tellingly, the Growth Association inserted “Greater” before “Cleveland” in local print ads, presumably understanding the lack of connection many suburbanites felt to the city proper.⁵⁵

This third comeback effort, which paralleled the Cleveland Foundation’s commissioning of a San Francisco planning firm to draft an aesthetically focused downtown plan aimed at “making



Man should not live on concrete alone.

Look, we're not complaining. Cities wouldn't be cities without it. But then, without a little relief from all the concrete, they wouldn't be terribly livable either.

That's why we also believe in parks. To break the monotony of the cold, hard stuff. To raise the spirits, awaken the soul.

Which, of course, is why we've surrounded ourselves with all this, literally and figuratively.

Huntington Reservation: 103 acres
Bradley Woods Reservation: 767 acres
Rocky River Reservation: 5,612 acres
Big Creek Reservation: 367 acres
Hinckley Reservation: 1,924 acres
Royalton-Brecksville Parkway: 283 acres

Brecksville Reservation: 2,768 acres
Bedford Reservation: 1,334 acres
Bedford-South Chagrin Parkway: 690 acres
South Chagrin Reservation: 614 acres
Chagrin Valley Parkway: 513 acres
North Chagrin Reservation: 1,719 acres
Euclid Creek Reservation: 343 acres
Brecksville-Bedford Parkway: 547 acres
And 40 more places both mammoth and modest, in or near every neighborhood all over town.

As you can see, we're not just talking about a few patches of green somewhere.

All those acres — all 18,000 of them — offer this city a commodity that's in exceedingly short supply around most

others, our size or not.

Sanctuaries for people and other living things. Complete with one swell zoo and six Metropolitan Park golf courses and seventeen sled runs and forty-nine ballfields and eighty-eight miles of bridle paths and ninety different picnic spots and infinitely more.

All in all, they're one of the very concrete reasons we can say the grass is really greener here.

CLEVELAND
The best things in life are here.

Figure 4. This Greater Cleveland Growth Association advertisement, one in a series of nine ads in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1974, depicted Cleveland as a city of serene, pastoral parklands. Such ads reflected boosters' hope to recast Cleveland's tarnished image.

Source. "When Cleveland Took Its Story to the Nation," Greater Cleveland Growth Association brochure, in author's possession, used with permission of Greater Cleveland Partnership.

people happier with their surroundings," drew upon booster narratives more than a decade in the making.⁵⁶ The transition to an emphasis on quality of life arose from two concurrent, related developments in Cleveland: civic leaders' decade-long campaign to elevate the stature of the city's cultural heart, University Circle, and the gradual onset of the urban crisis, especially deindustrialization. Concerns among leaders of the Circle's universities, hospitals, museums, and other institutions about the encroachment of urban decay in the 1950s led to unified planning to

bolster and safeguard their collective investment in the city. Coordinated by the University Circle Development Foundation (UCDF) starting in 1957, the initiative promised to become “a brain workers’ city within a city.” Significantly, the University Circle revitalization campaign represented the will of the suburban descendants of industrial tycoons who had built companies whose wealth had left Cleveland a legacy of well-endowed institutions and corporate headquarters. Facing increasingly aggressive competition for industrial growth from upstart Sunbelt cities that cast doubt on Cleveland’s claim to be the “Best Location in the Nation” for industry, Cleveland boosters heeded UCDF’s call to use University Circle in their business recruiting efforts.⁵⁷

Even as African Americans decried the hollowness of the CEI booster slogan in the early 1960s, deindustrialization began to force the reshaping of booster rhetoric and imagery. As in other cities in the industrial heartland, the “rusting” of Cleveland “began, unheralded, in the 1950s.”⁵⁸ Long before the word “deindustrialization” became a household word, Cleveland was losing manufacturing jobs. Thanks to the opening of suburban automotive factories, suburbanite-led boosterism and business recruitment efforts, and newspaper coverage that reported plant openings and expansions as successes, regardless of where in the metropolitan area they occurred, suburban industrial expansion temporarily masked losses in the central city. Indeed, CEI, the region’s dominant industrial recruiter, had every reason to champion industrial growth in outlying areas where it would compound electric use. Little by little, however, the news of plant closings began to invite scrutiny. In 1956, some 1,250 people lost their jobs when Murray Ohio closed its bicycle, toy, and fan factory in the Collinwood neighborhood and moved its bicycle division to a new plant built by a Tennessee town. The closing, the first reported by the *Plain Dealer*, led a chamber of commerce official to remark that all the factories that had left Cleveland in the previous five years would fit into a corner of one of the area’s new Ford plants in suburban Brook Park and Walton Hills.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, by the start of the 1960s, it became clear that the Murray Ohio closure marked a turning point, after which Greater Cleveland experienced the loss of tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs, including some 11,000 in the two largest closures: a garment factory and a sewing-machine factory.⁶⁰

The Greater Cleveland Growth Board (GCGB), set up in 1961 by the chamber of commerce as a separate organization dedicated to fighting the emerging problem of deindustrialization (and absorbed back into the reorganized chamber seven years later), worked to attract new industry and intervene whenever existing companies threatened to leave. In 1962, GCGB leaders created the foundation for a reimagined Cleveland when they brainstormed “reasons people should believe that Greater Cleveland is the best location in the nation.” Reprising the “Best Location” argument, they also pointed to the metropolitan area’s NASA Lewis Research Center, growing distribution and service sectors, and seventeen Fortune 500 headquarters. Of the thirty-nine points they identified, well over half focused on Cleveland’s quality of life, including its philanthropic legacy and renowned parks, museums, symphony orchestra, universities, and hospitals. Reflecting their insulated suburban perspective on the city, only four years before the Hough Riots, they also called Cleveland the “safest location in the nation” and a city “with no racial problem.”⁶¹

Following this brainstorming session, marketing campaigns in the early 1960s continued to boast of Cleveland’s natural locational advantages to manufacturers while also depicting a space-age city that embodied industrial innovation and cultural refinement. Among several ads placed in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1963, some highlighted the city’s physical situation. One proclaimed that, thanks to the recent opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, the distance from Cleveland to Copenhagen was less than from New York, transforming the Great Lakes into “a new North Coast of America.” Others announced that 30 percent of the world’s fresh water was “at the other end of your water line in Cleveland” and promised a “Drought-Proof Plant Site,” a clear dig at growing cities in the Southwest. Yet, others focused on something previously absent in marketing: the fact that the “Greater Cleveland Growthland” had the nation’s fourth largest concentration of research

laboratories, including a NASA installation. One ad superimposed a *Saturn V* space booster on the city's Terminal Tower and called attention to Cleveland-based Thompson Ramo Wooldridge's (TRW's) nation-leading provision of rocket nozzles and nose cones and the city's "Brain-power generators"—its universities.⁶²

While "Best Location" pitches hardly disappeared, cultural amenities now came to the fore. Tellingly, at a GCGB executive committee meeting in 1963, CEI chairman Elmer Lindseth pointed out that, despite the fact that efforts to attract corporate headquarters could not rely as heavily on objectivity as bids to persuade companies of the area's locational advantages for factories or warehouses, "a long range program definitely should be attempted."⁶³ If cultural arguments were more effective in wooing executives and their families, however, the Growth Board also employed them to shape production relocation decisions. As the Cleveland Orchestra became noted as one of the so-called "Big Five" orchestras under the direction of conductor George Szell in the postwar years, its international tours became an opportunity to sell Cleveland's brand.⁶⁴ A 1964 GCGB ad in the *Wall Street Journal*, titled "What Your Wife Knows about Finding a Plant Site," eschewed the usual views of smokestacks, skyscrapers, rail yards, or laboratories, picturing instead a benefit fashion show in Severance Hall, home of the famed Cleveland Orchestra. Four smartly dressed women posed in front of a six-panel screen painted to depict the symphony hall. The ad juxtaposed the presumed concerns of a male executive and his wife when contemplating moving to a new city. *He* would appreciate Cleveland's location within 500 miles of 53 percent of the U.S. market and its transportation infrastructure, industrial parks, and ample fresh water. *She* would take comfort in an art museum "second only to the Metropolitan, a symphony second to none," the fact that "many of Cleveland's sons make the Ivy League," and "the finest suburban living in the country." Returning to the executive, the ad concluded, "If your wife likes your new site, so will the wives of men you're trying to attract"⁶⁵ (see Figure 5). The 1964 ad, which mirrored similar quality-of-life arguments in other 1960s booster literature, would have been every bit as effective in the "Best Things" campaign a decade later. Although urban renewal failures, race riots, and vexing national publicity shattered any illusions of quickly resolving problems, the booster rhetoric forged on the eve of the urban crisis—with the suburban ideal and high culture at its core—proved remarkably resilient and anticipated the focus of the "Best Things" campaign.

Although at least a couple of suburban businesses incorporated "The Best Things in Life Are Here" into newspaper advertisements as late as the early 1980s, the Growth Association campaign accomplished little and quickly faded after 1975. Newspapers, magazines, and other media sold the idea of renaissance, but Clevelanders measured the distance between fiction and reality by surveying their surroundings. A Washington, D.C., transplant to the rebounding in-town neighborhood of Ohio City complained that the 18,000 acres of parkland mentioned in one Growth Association ad lay ten or more miles from most city residents. She added that "you'd better have a pretty strong stomach to withstand the mountains of garbage" in most city parks. She also questioned an ad touting education, pointing to "gangs of children [who] openly roam[ed her] neighborhood during school hours."⁶⁶ One Shaker Heights man wrote that "anyone dumb enough to believe that 'the best things in life are right here in Cleveland' deserves to breathe Cleveland's garbage and live in Cleveland's filth. Cleveland is a rotting corpse clothed in a hazy, blue-gray shroud."⁶⁷ In 1978, a poll found that only 20 percent of local civic leaders believed that Cleveland had improved significantly.⁶⁸ Amid gloom that slogans could not dispel, Clevelanders offered, tongue in cheek, more fitting slogans emblazoned on underground t-shirts. The most iconic one read, "Cleveland: You've Got To Be Tough," and showed the city skyline in the shadow of a dark cloud emitted by a pair of smokestacks.⁶⁹

By the late 1970s, the "Best Things" campaign faltered, and the use of the derisive "Mistake on the Lake" nickname became widespread. It is impossible to draw clear conclusions from



Benefit fashion show at Severance Hall, sponsored by The Cleveland Orchestra Women's Committee and produced by The Halle Bros. Co.

What your wife knows about finding a plant site

She's practical, not emotional, because your career comes first. So she'll be properly impressed by such factors as available raw materials, nearby markets, good transportation and other Greater Cleveland advantages. She's aware of the economic facts of life.

But she's subjective, the psychologists tell us. She considers things in terms of their effect on her and her family. High on your list of plant-site factors may be taxes, water, power rates. High on hers: the nature of nearby communities, the schools, shopping, cultural and recreational facilities — factors where we have

a decided edge on most sites favorable to industry. Let her tell you why Cleveland is worth investigating thoroughly. You know that 53% of the total U. S. market is within 500 miles of Cleveland. She knows that Cleveland has an art museum second only to the Metropolitan, a symphony second to none. You know Cleveland is a transportation hub. She's heard how many of Cleveland's sons make the Ivy League. You know about our industrial parks near unlimited fresh water. She knows we offer the finest suburban living in the country. Her approval means easier recruiting. If your wife likes

your new site, so will the wives of men you're trying to attract. So will the men. So will you. Compare us with other sites from a hard economic point of view — and then get your wife to make comparisons — from her point of view. You'll discover some more reasons why our current annual rate of industrial growth is \$220,000,000.

For further information, write or phone collect: Richard L. DeChant, Executive Director, Greater Cleveland Growth Board, Union Commerce Building, Cleveland, Ohio 44114. Phone: Area Code 216, 241-4386.

The GREATER CLEVELAND GROWTHLAND
ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS GROWTH



From the April 8, 1964 issue of The Wall Street Journal

Figure 5. This Greater Cleveland Growth Board advertisement, which appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1964, took advantage of several years of local booster efforts to elevate the stature of Cleveland's University Circle district and use it as a hook to attract corporate investment.

Source: Greater Cleveland Growth Association Records, container 133, folder 2, Western Reserve Historical Society, used with permission of Greater Cleveland Partnership.

newspaper references to the nickname because they are so fragmentary. Nonetheless, their usage of the nickname reveals that Clevelanders, if sometimes skeptical of booster slogans, also tended not to use the "Mistake" moniker to suggest the city was hopeless. They often

affixed the term to specific concerns, such as the appearance of a dump for abandoned and towed cars along the Memorial Shoreway on the approach to downtown or a controversial plan for a futuristic jetport on an island in Lake Erie.⁷⁰ It is also difficult to gauge the representativeness of the many letters or columns in the *Plain Dealer* that cited the nickname in the process of proclaiming the city's virtues. After all, the newspaper's editor Thomas Vail was among the most vociferous defenders of Cleveland. One Pompano Beach, Florida, columnist and former *Cleveland*er praised the city's many first-class institutions. "Thinking about getting sick?" he asked.

Then get sick in "the mistake on the lake" because hospitals there are the best in the world, as witnessed by King Khaled Ibn Abdul Aziz the Great of Saudi Arabia who . . . descended on Cleveland in September for open-heart surgery.⁷¹

Likewise, a congressional aide and Cleveland native blamed Clevelanders' negativity for creating the city's bad image, while a writer from the outlying town of Hudson suspected that a silent majority liked Cleveland.⁷²

A *Plain Dealer* article in 1979 attempted to account for the city's "case of civic schizophrenia," evident in the fact that Clevelanders "vacillate between" the "best location in the nation" and the "Mistake on the lake." Seeking deeper roots than Kucinich, the burning river, or even the urban crisis, the authors blamed social fragmentation traceable to the clash between the descendants of "Yankee founders of the Western Reserve" and the East European immigrants who followed them, exacerbated by the arrival of "a massive immigration of southern blacks," and unresolved even by Stokes's promise of unity. They also pointed to blue-sky plans of the city's growth coalition, indifference of its wealthiest families, antipathy between city dwellers and suburbanites, and division of the metropolitan area into thirty-three wards and sixty suburban municipalities, concluding that only a regional government of the sort that Clevelanders defeated two decades before might resolve Cleveland's "dual image."⁷³ Whether or not social fragmentation played a critical role, Clevelanders' experience of the city's post-World War II difficulties forced them constantly to seek to reconcile in their own minds the gap between booster rhetoric and the state of the city as they perceived it.

If locals wrestled with whether to "buy" booster representations of their city, outside observers in the 1970s were less kind to Cleveland. A Chicago journalist returning from Cleveland called the city "dreadful," "with hotels to match," and concluded that "[t]here is no such thing as a good view in Cleveland."⁷⁴ When Cleveland hosted the Davis Cup finals between the United States and Australia in December 1973, one Melbourne sportswriter quipped, "If this is the capital of the tennis world this weekend, I'd hate to go to one of the outposts." Taking aim at the "Best Things" slogan, *Plain Dealer* sports editor Hal Lebovitz complained that the Cleveland Orchestra could go to Australia, but Cleveland promoters could not find a way to show visiting journalists more than the "short downtown walk through the dirty snow" to the Public Auditorium.⁷⁵ Despite the negative publicity, Cleveland's convention trade remained brisk through the mid-1970s, drawing around a half million visitors annually. Then things took a turn for the worse.⁷⁶ Suffering from a lack of first-class hotel rooms and ballroom space, its leading hotel languishing in receivership, union disputes over labor at the convention center, and a dearth of downtown restaurants, taxi service, and police protection, Cleveland saw the cancellation of conventions representing 160,000 prospective visitors in 1976-1977, leading the thirty-five-year director of the Cleveland Convention and Visitors Bureau (CCVB) to step down.⁷⁷ In 1977, Mayor Dennis Kucinich cut the city's annual \$300,000 subsidy to the CCVB, vowing that his administration could promote the city more effectively.⁷⁸ Second to Chicago into the late 1960s, Cleveland's convention trade now mirrored its larger problems.⁷⁹

A “Plum” on “America’s North Coast”: Selling the “New Cleveland” Comeback

By the late 1970s, mounting challenges prompted a recasting of rosy narratives. Proclamations about the “best things in life,” like CEI’s “Best Location” claim, seemed out of touch. Along with area-wide deindustrialization, a mayoral recall bid, and a looming municipal default, even Cleveland’s reputation as a headquarters city appeared tenuous. In 1977-1979, four Fortune 500 corporations—AM International, Diamond Shamrock, Harris, and White Motor—moved their headquarters to other cities.⁸⁰ In this context, it became common for companies to proclaim dutifully that they still believed in Cleveland. When Cleveland Trust, the city’s leading bank, proposed changing its name to AmeriTrust, it faced vocal shareholder opposition. Although purportedly calculated to facilitate statewide expansion, many interpreted it in light of recent blows to the city’s reputation, prompting AmeriTrust to reaffirm commitment to Cleveland. Within a month, a full-page *Plain Dealer* ad proclaimed, “Cleveland has become a bigger part of America. . . . And America has become a bigger part of Cleveland.” Citing a ten-year, \$55 million investment in facilities, AmeriTrust insisted, “We believe in Cleveland,” a corporate echo of Carl Stokes a decade earlier.⁸¹

However, the most effective Cleveland booster campaign since CEI’s “Best Location in the Nation” more than three decades earlier emerged in 1978 in the editorial offices of the *Plain Dealer*. Thomas Vail, a descendant of the founders of the *Plain Dealer* and White Motor Company, became the newspaper’s publisher and editor in 1963. After fifteen years of trying to make the newspaper a more effective mouthpiece for promoting Cleveland, he conceived the New Cleveland Campaign as the city’s reputation hit rock bottom. Vail got the idea for the campaign when he went to Kansas City to cover the 1976 Republican National Convention and observed the work of Hallmark Cards, which funded an effective city promotion effort during the convention.⁸² Hoping to de-emphasize the city’s problems, he drew a lesson from the common assumption, reinforced by a Growth Association poll of executives, of a chasm between attitudes toward Cleveland before and after moving there.⁸³ In an effort to attract corporate executives and retain existing residents, the New Cleveland Campaign tried to deflect preoccupation with the city’s problems by focusing on the lifestyle that surprised newcomers.

New Cleveland Campaign promotional materials depicted “A New Generation” enjoying the good life.⁸⁴ In its first promotional booklet, a management consultant remarked, “My wife didn’t want to move to Cleveland; but now that she’s here, you couldn’t get her to leave.”⁸⁵ Similarly, a special section in *Cleveland Magazine* told of a pediatrician who reluctantly left Manhattan for Cleveland. His family traded living on the thirtieth floor of a Manhattan high-rise for suburban Shaker Heights—learning how to remove grass stains from their child’s clothes, coordinate a car pool, barbecue, and trick or treat on Halloween.⁸⁶ Another campaign booklet cover centered on a circular fisheye photo of a brick mansion and an inset photo of two cellists. Its caption bespoke the growing emphasis on lifestyle (see Figure 6):

The burnished gold and brilliant blue skies of autumn in the Cleveland suburb of Shaker Heights. Five minutes away, Alan Harris coaches a student at the Cleveland Institute of Music in University Circle, Cleveland’s unique cluster of cultural and educational institutions.⁸⁷

If charts, maps, and diagrams sufficed in the midcentury heyday of CEI’s advertising, colorful photos emphasizing quality of life prevailed once Cleveland’s leaders understood that location alone could not assure growth.

Campaign literature continued to conflate Cleveland with the suburban ideal found in the earlier “Best Things in Life” campaign, which one executive called an exercise in “mass self-hypnosis.” One promotional booklet extolled an “abundance of handsome suburbs” and schools

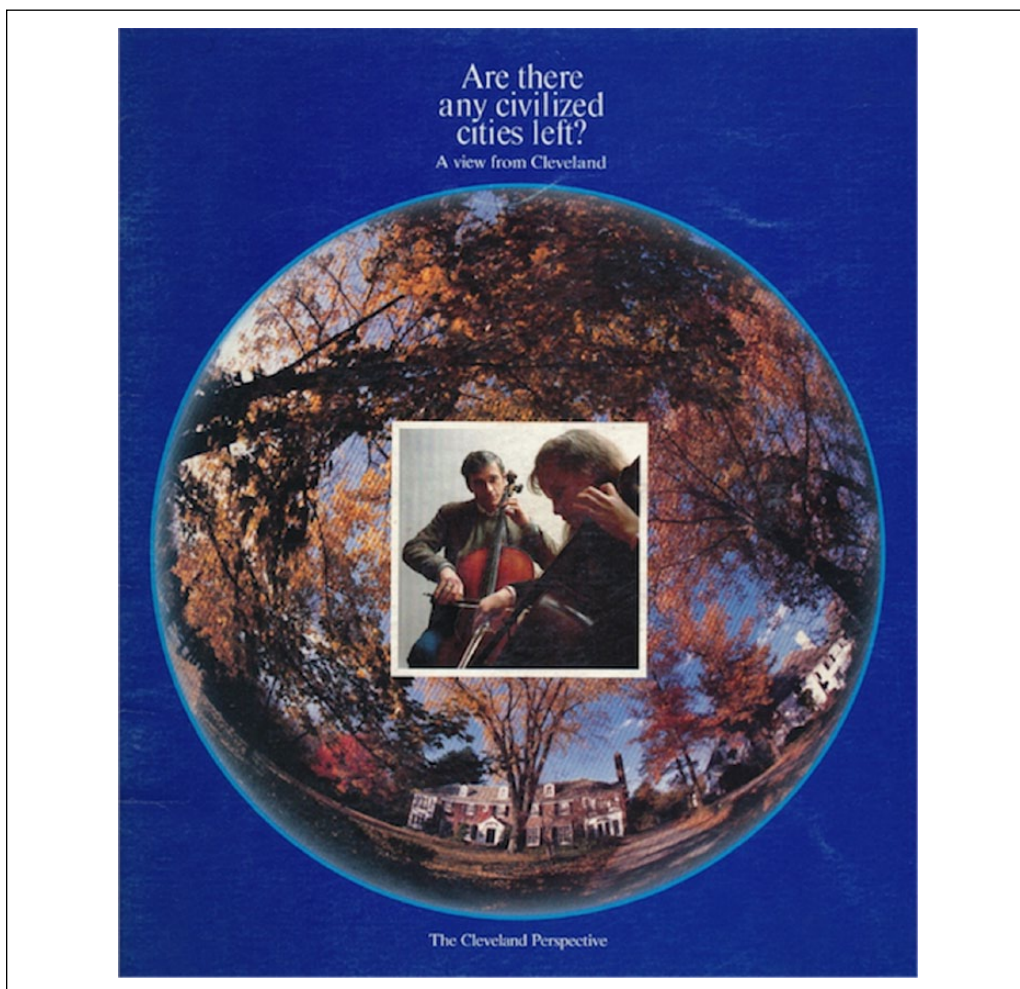


Figure 6. The New Cleveland Campaign touted Greater Cleveland's quality of life to counter the city's fraught image in the 1970s.

Source: *Are There Any Civilized Cities Left?* (Cleveland: New Cleveland Campaign, 1982), in author's possession.

"ranking with those of cities like Scarsdale, Wellesley, Grosse Pointe and Beverly Hills." Yet, the campaign acknowledged challenges and insisted that Cleveland was confronting them. Another booklet admitted manufacturing losses but noted that expanding sectors such as medicine were offsetting them. Responding to rapid Sun Belt growth, the book added that Cleveland "quietly and steadily grows." In a city wracked by a controversial busing program to achieve school desegregation, a photo highlighted a racially integrated Shaker Heights classroom. To counter years of feuding and racial discord in City Hall, one ad in the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* showed Mayor George Voinovich and black city councilman George Forbes standing side by side. To underscore the contrast from the acrimonious Kucinich administration, the ad proclaimed "a new frame of mind."⁸⁸

On May 29, 1981, Mayor Voinovich threw out the first pitch at the Cleveland Indians-New York Yankees baseball game—with a plum. Just as Vail used the New Cleveland Campaign to project a fresh face of the Northeast Ohio region nationally, he commissioned the *Plain Dealer's* public relations firm to create a poster aimed at travelers passing through LaGuardia Airport in

New York to sell Cleveland as a “choice market in which to advertise.” The poster’s slogan, “New York’s the Big Apple, but Cleveland’s a Plum,” became such a sensation that Vail decided to direct it toward building pride in a city that had weathered its most difficult decade since the Great Depression. “Cleveland’s a Plum” soon appeared not only in the *Plain Dealer* but also on purple t-shirts, buttons, posters, and nearly half a million bumper stickers delivered to its subscribers. A variety of local businesses coordinated promotions with the “Plum” campaign, including Halle’s department store, which served a special “Plum Crazy” cocktail in two eateries on the ninth floor of its Euclid Avenue flagship, and a downtown restaurant that served plum pie to diners.⁸⁹ Two years after it moved its headquarters to Dallas, Diamond Shamrock even felt moved to pledge \$350,000 to the effort to restore downtown Cleveland’s Playhouse Square, whose theaters had nearly faced the wrecking ball several years earlier. Less than two weeks into the “Plum” campaign, the mineral-mining company placed an ad in the *Plain Dealer* titled “We believe in Cleveland,” in which the corporation affirmed its commitment “to the revitalization of our city” (emphasis added).⁹⁰

The “Plum” slogan drew mixed reviews from locals. Upon its debut, a downtown office worker told the *Plain Dealer* that she liked the campaign because “[p]eople have been knocking Cleveland for too long and it should end.”⁹¹ Not everyone found the slogan persuasive, however. The appearance of “Cleveland’s a Slum” bumper stickers that mocked the *Plain Dealer*’s boosterism demonstrated once again that sloganeering seldom managed more than a veneer of optimism.⁹² Of the many letters to the editor about the campaign published during its first few weeks, most were negative or equivocal toward the slogan. Some pointed out that the plum might easily shrivel into a prune, though one quipped that the city could never dry up given how rarely the sun shone. The following winter, the downtown Cleveland ticket office of Eastern Air Lines used a sign with the words “Don’t Be a Numb Plum” to advertise bargain fares to “warmer climes.”⁹³

Eastern’s promotion was surely one more sign of the Sun Belt competition that Great Lakes cities like Cleveland faced in retaining, let alone attracting, businesses and residents. Yet, Cleveland’s tourism and convention boosters finally employed, on a large scale, rhetoric and images once used almost exclusively to attract corporate investment to depict the city as an exciting destination for leisure and recreation. In 1979, the reorganized Greater Cleveland Convention and Visitors Bureau (GCCVB) unveiled the largest and most effective marketing campaign in its history, which led to the first suggestion in the *Plain Dealer* of “The Mistake on the Lake” as lying in the city’s past. With a convention center that now lagged far behind the capacity of competitors in many other cities and a similar lack of centralized hotels, promoters turned to the discretionary traveler. A new slogan, “The Great Lake City on America’s North Coast,” branded Cleveland as exciting and implicitly invited tourists to join Clevelanders in celebrating the revitalization of the lake. In contrast to the 1960s, when media images of Cleveland depicted Lake Erie only in terms of its provision of water for manufacturing plants or its hopeful function as a conduit of expanding seagoing trade, boosters now cast the nexus of city and lake as a locus of leisure and recreation, even boasting that Cleveland had more yacht clubs than San Diego. Promotional photos now regularly showed colorful sailboats in shots of the city skyline viewed from out in the lake, scenes of pleasure seekers in the Flats entertainment district, bird’s-eye views of downtown buildings set against the lake, and compositions that juxtaposed the Terminal Tower, Veterans Memorial Bridge, and the Cuyahoga River in the Flats (see Figure 7). Convention promoters plied meeting planners with everything from a stereo album of “Brahms Symphony No. 1” by the Cleveland Orchestra to bottles of municipal water labeled “North Coast Comfort.”⁹⁴ GCCVB also launched a \$250,000 campaign in 1981 to promote Cleveland to leisure travelers. Using slogans such as “Discover Cleveland on America’s North Coast” and “Vacation on the Coast,” it targeted readers of *Reader’s Digest*, *TV Guide*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, and *Family Circle*, as well as regional newspapers within a 200-mile radius.⁹⁵



Figure 7. Beginning in the early 1980s, the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland presented Cleveland as a coastal city, furthering the process of undoing the damage that the 1969 Cuyahoga River fire and nationally publicized Lake Erie pollution had inflicted on Cleveland's image. In this cover image from a promotional booklet, a sailboat accentuates the idea that Cleveland is a city of leisure and recreation.

Source. W. Plato Administrator Files, box 7, file 139, Cuyahoga County Archives, used with permission of Destination Cleveland.

Taking cues (often directly) from Cleveland boosters, travel writers lauded Cleveland as a fine city for a family vacation, pointing to its nationally significant symphony, museums, and theaters; the vibrant scene along its downtown riverfront; its historic Arcade and West Side Market; and newer attractions like Sea World in suburban Aurora. One article exulted that “the *new* Cleveland,” no longer “the Rodney Dangerfield of cities,” “has plenty to offer the tourist.”

Another writer even called Cleveland “a miniature New York” that conjured fond memories of New York City in the 1950s.⁹⁶ While Cleveland’s number of conventioners sagged to little more than 100,000 annually in the early 1980s, the city’s tourism statistics are impossible to track because, into the mid-1980s, the GCCVB did not collect statistics on tourists.⁹⁷ Although one report claimed University Circle drew seventeen million visitors a year, roughly equal to Disney World, this number surely reflected mostly visits from within the Cleveland metropolitan area. A local taxicab driver admitted in 1982 that he saw only the occasional tourist, calling into question whether the city’s comeback was meaningful to tourists. It is similarly difficult to assess how tourists viewed the “North Coast” city. In an article titled “In Search of the Elusive Cleveland Tourist,” a *Plain Dealer* reporter sought out foreign visitors for their impressions and found that many had already been to leading American tourist cities and, in the words of a Finnish visitor, chose Cleveland simply to understand “the American way of life.” Tourist comments in the Terminal Tower observation deck’s register presented mixed impressions of a city that ranged from “green and friendly” to “a bit scruffy.” Perhaps referring to Erievue, an English visitor commented to the reporter on his dismay at “a lot of open spaces where they’ve knocked down buildings and haven’t yet made up their minds what to do there,” but he described the newly restored Arcade as a fine building that could easily fit in England. According to the reporter, the very attractions most touted by local boosters were too distant in the eyes of many visitors. With taxi service that *Town & Country* magazine called “arguably the worst in America,” tourists could easily find themselves confined to the “limited night life and activities” in downtown.⁹⁸ If scant evidence exists to characterize outsiders’ impressions of Cleveland as a destination, it is clear that critiques crossed the line when they invoked derisive images of the city. When Clevelanders learned of a Dallas sports reporter who called attention to Texas Rangers players’ disappointment at having to spend off-field time in the “Mistake on the Lake,” they flooded his office with more than four hundred angry letters and telephone calls, suggesting the limited penetration of booster messages aimed at outsiders.⁹⁹

Even if Cleveland leaders had to admit that boosterism alone could not transform Cleveland into a major tourist city, Cleveland’s “comeback” finally appeared at hand where it seemed to matter most after a decades-long pursuit of revitalization—in the eye of many locals and national media. Perhaps conditioned by similar success stories coming from Boston and Baltimore, Clevelanders and the national media seemed ready to believe that the city had turned a corner. If Cleveland continued to lose population, it did so at the slowest rate in four decades, and in the same period, city neighborhoods registered more new housing starts than the suburbs for the first time.¹⁰⁰ If the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie remained polluted, the lake was now clean enough for boosters to picture a colorful sailboat framed by the city’s skyline in the distance. In the 1980s, the nickname “The Mistake on the Lake” appeared in print more than ever, but it was almost always used as a foil for the success of the “Comeback City.”¹⁰¹ Citing the city’s financial recovery, political reforms, and the public–private partnership that was restoring Playhouse Square, the National Municipal League named Cleveland an All-America City in 1981 and 1982. Rand McNally’s *Places Rated Almanac* ranked Cleveland No. 2 in recreational opportunities and No. 14 overall among more than three hundred American cities.¹⁰² A range of national periodicals dutifully reported the city’s comeback. Sometimes they went so far as to depict its decline as being sparked by bad publicity and arrested by Voinovich’s election. *U.S. News and World Report* traced Cleveland’s image problem only back to June 22, 1969, cited the river fire as the main catalyst for the environmentalist movement, and credited Voinovich with creating conditions ripe for a comeback. *Reader’s Digest* offered a similar narrative, substituting a second infamous fire—when Mayor Ralph Perk accidentally ignited his hair while trying to cut a metal ribbon with a torch to open an industrial metals show at the Cleveland Convention Center.¹⁰³

The preceding look at four successive comeback strategies in Cleveland suggests the limitations of top-down city narratives. Slogan campaigns work best when they mirror tangible urban

strengths. When measured against the city's particularly vexing circumstances in the late 1960s to late 1970s, the comeback engineered by corporate Cleveland, Voinovich, and Vail appeared all the more believable. It did not have to achieve a complete revival to garner local and national support; it merely had to demonstrate positive steps. The 1979-1981 comeback bid, while more persuasive than previous efforts, also proved ephemeral because it could not promise a lasting renaissance any more than earlier booster campaigns. Its strength reflected the will of Cleveland's boosters more than the actual state of Cleveland. In the 1980s, Cleveland lost more than 68,000 residents. It has lost more than 100,000 people since 1990. Even Cuyahoga County has steadily lost population since its 1970 peak, and the five-county Cleveland metropolitan area has lost close to 10 percent of its peak population in that year.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, Cleveland is in the midst of a fifth discernible comeback several years in the making. The latest comeback, which unfolded in the midst of the Great Recession, relies on large-scale projects not entirely unlike those of the 1980s-1990s comeback, such as Jacobs Field and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. It trumpets \$6 billion of construction projects in downtown, University Circle, and the rechristened "Cleveland Health-Tech Corridor" that connects them. It touts a mammoth downtown casino, medical mart, heart center, transit corridor, and expanded art museum and convention center as signs of a new direction. Yet, to a greater degree than in the past, the latest renaissance reflects both a suspicion of overreliance on big projects and the participation of myriad small-scale entrepreneurial and grassroots players: nanobreweries, farm-to-table partnerships, and neighborhood arts districts among them. It relies less on painting Cleveland as a great place to live the American Dream or take a family vacation, and more on making the best of the city's situation, one that Richey Piiparinen and Anne Trubek, editors of a recent anthology titled *Rust Belt Chic*, characterize as being marked by "contradiction, conflict, and standing resiliency." Indeed, by 2014, Positively Cleveland, as the city's convention and visitors bureau restyled itself, unveiled its latest slogan campaign: "This is Cleveland."¹⁰⁴ While this pastiche of images seemingly reflects a city that has absorbed the "rust belt chic" mentality, the campaign (like previous ones) offers its own rosy, unifying vision as an alternative to the unbridgeable gap between expectation and outcome that compromised Cleveland's last comeback.

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Notes

1. Remarks by Mayor George V. Voinovich, City Club Forum, November 9, 1984, container 4, folder 13, George V. Voinovich Papers (hereafter GVV), Western Reserve Historical Society (hereafter WRHS).
2. Repr.: Daniel B. Wood, "Cleveland: Maligned, Scoffed at, This Midwest City Has Bounced Back," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 16, 1982, container 4, folder 11, GVV.
3. "Burke Cool over Baltimore Gains; Sees Cleveland Metropolitan Area in Lead," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 22, 1950.
4. The historiography of the urban crisis is becoming voluminous. See especially Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and*

Public Policy on Chicago's West Side (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Scholarship on the political, economic, and social dimensions of urban revitalization efforts includes Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Howard Gillette Jr., *Camden after the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-industrial City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Guian McKee, *The Problem of Jobs: Liberalism, Race, and Deindustrialization in Philadelphia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). For examples of recent scholarship that focuses on the cultural manifestations of urban change in the twentieth century, including perceptions of these changes, see especially S. Paul O'Hara, *Gary, the Most American of All American Cities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Alicia Barber, *Reno's Big Gamble: Image and Reputation in the Biggest Little City* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008); Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, eds., *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

5. This article draws upon research for my current book project, provisionally titled "Believing in Cleveland: Managing Decline in 'The Best Location in the Nation.'"
6. See, for example, Lawrence S. Robbins, "Decentralization: A Problem in Cleveland's Future," a Report Prepared for the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, April 1941. On signs of prewar decline, see Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*; Robert Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: The Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), chap. 4.
7. A graphic illustration of the dearth of housing starts in Cleveland's poorest neighborhoods may be seen in the "Places for New Families" maps in Howard Whipple Green, *Family and Housing Characteristics* (Cleveland: Cleveland Real Property Inventory, 1955-1961), WRHS. On renewal failures, see Fred McGunagle, "Failure after Failure Recited in Report Blasting Renewal Work," *Cleveland Press*, November 16, 1966; Eugene Segal, "Outlook Bad for Area O Renewal Job," *Plain Dealer*, May 3, 1960. As late as 1966, one of the city's two planned industrial urban renewal projects had conveyed only three of ninety-nine acres to developers and no land had been sold in the second. For more on 1950s renewal in Cleveland, see William D. Jenkins, "Before Downtown: Cleveland, Ohio, and Urban Renewal, 1949-1958," *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 4 (May 2001): 471-96. On the devastating results of the first projects, notably Garden Valley, see Todd M. Michney, "White Civic Visions versus Black Suburban Aspirations," *Journal of Planning History* 10, no. 4 (November 2011): 282-309.
8. "America's Sewage System and the Price of Optimism," *TIME Magazine*, August 1, 1969. Historian David Stradling argues that the burning river served as both the end of a declension narrative of industrial degradation and the advent of a narrative of renewal that intersected with the emerging environmental movement; David Stradling and Richard Stradling, "Perceptions of the Burning River: Deindustrialization and Cleveland's Cuyahoga River," *Environmental History* 13, no. 3 (July 2008): 515-35.
9. Long after the 1950 census forced Cleveland to relinquish its "Sixth City" slogan, Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company (CEI) mixed electric provision and economic development. The best source for tracing the rise and decline of the "Best Location" slogan is the collection of CEI annual reports at Cleveland Public Library, Public Administration Library, Cleveland, Ohio.
10. John Kovacic, interview by Maurice Klain, n.d. [ca. 1960], transcript, p. 50, container 7, folder 365, Maurice Klain Research Papers (hereafter MK), WRHS.
11. Interview #57 (1960), interview #533 (1961), and interview #61 (n.d. [ca. 1960]), MK, Note: In cases of confidential interviews that remain restricted, WRHS has assigned random numbers to protect interviewees' identity.
12. "Home Rule Killed by City Vote," *Plain Dealer*, November 4, 1959; "Mall Site Measure Rejected," *Plain Dealer*, November 4, 1959; Marc D. Gleisser, "'New CTS' Urged as 'Tube' Dies," *Plain Dealer*, December 22, 1959. On the class dimensions of opposition to the Mall hotel and subway plans, see, for example, interview #6 (1960) and interview #489 (1960), MK; Philip W. Porter, "Porter on Mall

- Plan,” *Plain Dealer*, February 19, 1959; and Sanford Watzman, “1st Gun Fired in War over Hotel on Mall,” *Plain Dealer*, July 7, 1959.
13. Public Hearing on the Downtown Subway before the County Commissioners, December 8-9, 1959, 759-61, 765, 768, 788-90, 893, 899-900, 949-50, box 2, Board of County Commissioners Collection (hereafter BCC), Cuyahoga County Archives, Cleveland, Ohio (hereafter CCA).
 14. See, for example, Tom Ireland, City Club speech, n.d. [1959], container 1, folder 4, Thomas Saxton Ireland Papers (hereafter TSI), WRHS; B. K. Foster, letter to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, March 29, 1959; Board of Trustees, Citizens League of Greater Cleveland, “The Mall Hotel Issue,” position paper, September 30, 1959, container 21, folder “Committee for Civic Progress (Mall Hotel), 1959,” Cleveland Development Foundation records, WRHS.
 15. Eugene Segal, “Gradual Development in the ‘60s Is Seen for Downtown Cleveland,” *Plain Dealer*, January 4, 1960, 36; Donald Sabath and Roldo S. Bartimole, “Planners Last to Hear of Plans,” *Plain Dealer*, February 28, 1966; interview #104 (1960), MK.
 16. Marvin B. Sussman and R. Clyde White, *Hough, Cleveland, Ohio: A Study of Social Life and Change* (Cleveland: Press of Western Reserve University, 1959), 12; Daniel R. Kerr, *Derelict Paradise: Homelessness and Urban Development in Cleveland, Ohio* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 148-49. The University-Euclid plan took advantage of a revision of the National Housing Act that enabled cities to claim expenditures by institutions such as universities and hospitals. University Circle institutions had spent hundreds of thousands of private dollars since 1957 to elevate their stature and fend off unwanted “changes” that began to encroach. See J. Mark Souther, “Acropolis of the Middle-West: Decay, Renewal, and Boosterism in Cleveland’s University Circle,” *Journal of Planning History* 10, no. 1 (February 2011): 39.
 17. Curtis Lee Smith, interview by Maurice Klain, August 8, 1961, transcript, p. 97, container 12, folder 603, MK.
 18. Anthony J. Celebrezze, “Do We Have the Will?,” speech to Chamber of Commerce, April 25, 1961, container 9, folder 177, Anthony J. Celebrezze Papers (hereafter AJC), WRHS.
 19. Thomas F. Patton to Anthony J. Celebrezze, November 9, 1960, container 4, folder 67, AJC.
 20. Editorial: “Let’s Get Growing, Cleveland!,” *KYW TV and Radio Station* (Cleveland, Ohio), November 4-7, 1960, container 4, folder 67, AJC.
 21. Jeannette J. [Mrs. John B.] Dempsey to Anthony J. Celebrezze, November 13, 1960, container 4, folder 67, AJC.
 22. John Huth, interview by Maurice Klain, October 11, 1960, transcript, p. 6, container 6, folder 301, MK.
 23. Albert A. Levin to Elmer L. Lindseth, October 11, 1963, container 43, folder “Lindseth, Elmer L. (I),” Cleveland Development Foundation records, WRHS. For additional examples, see interview #272 (1962), interview #12 (1962), and interview #66 (1960), MK.
 24. On downtown real estate owners’ and merchants’ views of Erieview, see especially interview #123 (1961), interview #57 (1960), and interview #534 (1960), MK. On downtown retail decline, see Teaford, *Rough Road*, 129-31. On the drop in downtown retailing in Cleveland, see Public Hearing on the Downtown Subway before the County Commissioners, November 30, December 1, 1959, transcript, pp. 67-69, 114-15, boxes 1 and 2, BCC.
 25. On the linkage between race and property, see especially David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
 26. Interview #200 (1960), MK. See also Curtis Lee Smith, interview by Maurice Klain, August 8, 1961, transcript, p. 37, container 12, folder 602, MK.
 27. To be sure, some blacks had lived in the suburbs for decades. Yet their numbers were very small well into the 1960s. Only a token few blacks had managed to break through the ivory curtain into East Cleveland and Shaker Heights. See Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); W. Dennis Keating, *The Suburban Racial Dilemma: Housing and Neighborhoods* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
 28. “The Best Location in the Nation?,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 24, 1962; William O. Walker, “Downtown Cleveland, a Victim of Prejudice and Selfishness,” *Call and Post*, February 24, 1962; “This One Smells Real Bad,” *Call and Post*, December 2, 1961.

29. While the exact origin of the nickname is obscure, past accounts have wrongly attributed its advent to either the aging Municipal Stadium or the tempest of problems that beset Cleveland in the 1970s. See Philip Suchma, "If They Built It? Stadium Dreams and Rustbelt Realities in Cleveland," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 11 (September 2008): 1547-64; David C. Perry, "Cleveland: Journey to Maturity," in *Cleveland: A Metropolitan Reader*, ed. W. Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholz, and David C. Perry (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1995), 11.
30. Lois K. Dawson, letter to the editor, *Call and Post*, May 2, 1964.
31. Leonard Franks, interview by Maurice Klain, Cleveland, Ohio, n.d. [ca. 1960], transcript, pp. 34-35, 42, container 5, folder 207, MK.
32. Interview #176, n.d. [ca. 1960], MK.
33. George V. Hooper, letter to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, May 16, 1965.
34. Paul Lilley, "New Urban Renewal Here Keyed to Speedup of Present Projects," *Cleveland Press*, June 1, 1966.
35. Souther, "Acropolis of the Middle-West," 42, 50.
36. Advertisement: "It's Time to Believe in Cleveland," *Plain Dealer*, July 28, 1967; Tom Ireland campaign flyer, n.d. [1959], container 1, folder 3, TSI; Advertising supplement: "The 34,000 Jobs That Got Away," *Plain Dealer*, October 28, 1962; "White Voters Urged to 'Save Cleveland,'" *Plain Dealer*, September 21, 1967; Advertising supplement: "Isn't It about Time We Had a Successful Mayor? Frank P. Celeste," *Plain Dealer*, September 24, 1967.
37. Timothy D. Armbruster, "Crisis in Cleveland: Rx: Instant Public Relations for an Ailing City," *Public Relations Journal*, August 1968, 10-12, container 13, folder 226, Carl B. Stokes Papers (hereafter CBS), WRHS; interview of Richard Murway, Press Secretary to Mayor Carl B. Stokes, July 1971, transcript, pp. 19-21, container 7, folder 104, CBS; Carl B. Stokes, "The Quality of Our Environment," transcript of speech given in St. Petersburg, Florida, n.d. [ca. 1970], 10, container 51, folder 951, CBS.
38. "Restaurant Staying Here; Owner Hails Mayor's Plan," *Plain Dealer*, May 7, 1968.
39. Interview of Ben S. Stefanski II, Director, Utilities Department, City of Cleveland, July 1971 transcript, pp. 9-11, 15-18, container 7, folder 106, CBS; William C. Barnard, "Lighting Program Follows Old Plans," *Plain Dealer*, March 11, 1968; "'Santa Loop' Is Shoppers' Bus Service," *Plain Dealer*, November 23, 1969. The Santa Loop was one of three "experimental services" of the Cleveland Transportation Action Program (CTAP), a Cleveland: NOW! project. The other bus routes connected poor inner-city neighborhoods to Metropolitan General Hospital and the Jones & Laughlin Steel works in the Flats.
40. Mayor Ralph S. Locher, news releases, October 6 and 21, 1965, container 8, folder 5, Ralph S. Locher Papers, WRHS; "Dim Lighting Had Nothing to Do with Murder, DeMello Says," *Plain Dealer*, November 11, 1966.
41. Advertisement: "Euclid Avenue Is Four Times Brighter!," *Plain Dealer*, October 29, 1969; "City Proclaims Its New Lights Downtown Are Brightest of All," *Plain Dealer*, October 31, 1969; Cleveland Electric Illuminating, *1952 Annual Report*. An uptick in brazen downtown crimes made the news in early 1966; "Wolf Pack Hunt on Downtown," *Plain Dealer* March 4, 1966; Donald L. Bean and K. J. Kissell, "Fear Forces Stores Downtown to Take Protective Measures," *Plain Dealer*, March 7, 1966. Occasional articles prior to this time commented on generalized concerns about downtown crime in Cleveland. Afterward, however, it became a recurring issue, as seen in numerous newspaper articles and mayoral correspondence; CBS and Ralph J. Perk Papers.
42. City of Cleveland, "Commercial and Tourism Complex," Application to EDA for Public Works and Development Facilities, July 28, 1969, Exhibit 11, container 76, folder 1453, CBS.
43. Norman Mlachak, "Has a Year of Stokes Been a Success or a Failure?," *Cleveland Press*, November 7, 1968; Thomas Vail, "A Summing Up on Carl Stokes," *Plain Dealer*, July 18, 1971; Repr: James M. Naughton, "Mayor Stokes: The First Hundred Days," *New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 1968, container 13, folder "Various Articles," Cleveland Development Foundation records, WRHS; Carl B. Stokes, typescript speech, n.d. [ca. 1968-1969], container 28, folder 495, CBS.
44. Debra Lynn Thompson to Carl B. Stokes, June 7, 1968, attached to Letters from students of Room 118, H. W. Longfellow School, 650 E. 40th St., container 13, folder 217, CBS. On the Glenville incident as turning point, see Ed Hocevar in interview of Tony Midolo and Ed Hocevar, Mayor's Security

- Men, July 1971, transcript, pp. 1-2, container 6, folder 100, CBS; Interview of David Hill, Director, Human Resources Department, July 1971, transcript, pp. 7-11, container 6, folder 100, CBS; David G. Hill to Carl B. Stokes, June 15, 1971, container 6, folder 100, CBS; Interview of S. Tony Midolo, Cleveland Police Department, Mayor's Security, July 1971, transcript, p. 7, container 7, folder 103, CBS; Murway interview, p. 7; Mlachak, "Success or Failure?"
45. H. H. Kirby to Ralph J. Perk, May 14, 1969, container 32, folder 434, Ralph J. Perk Papers (hereafter RJP), WRHS.
 46. Russ Musarra, "Here's What Cleveland Now Has Done," *Cleveland Press*, November 27, 1969; Daniel Henninger, "They Ought to Have Utopia by Now," *New Republic*, August 30, 1969, p. 13, container 28, folder 499, CBS. On Stokes's housing record, see Interview of Richard Green, Director of Community Development Department, City of Cleveland, July 1971, transcript, pp. 11-12, container 6, folder 99, CBS.
 47. Hugh Beattie to Daniel B. Wiles, November 22, 1969, container 55, folder 1036, CBS.
 48. Statement by Ralph J. Perk, October 30, 1969, container 6, folder 96, RJP.
 49. Ralph J. Perk, statement on law enforcement, n.d. [1969], container 6, folder 96, RJP.
 50. George E. Condon, "Cleveland? What's So Funny?," *Plain Dealer*, November 24, 1970; Edward A. Goldrick, letter to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, December 4, 1970. Appearing just seven times in the *Plain Dealer* between 1964 and 1969, the nickname made forty appearances in the newspaper in the 1970s and seventy-seven times in the 1980s; *NewsBank Cleveland Plain Dealer Historical Newspaper*, Cleveland Public Library.
 51. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 269.
 52. "When Cleveland Took Its Story to the Nation," booklet of advertisement reprints from *New York Times Magazine*, 1975, in author's possession.
 53. *Quality of Living in Cleveland-Northeast Ohio* (Cleveland: Cleveland Illuminating, 1977), container 2, folder 53, Daniel J. Marschall Papers (hereafter DJM), WRHS. The gradual disappearance of "The Best Location in the Nation" was apparent in a close examination of a complete run of CEI annual reports in the 1960s and 1970s, available in the Public Administration Library, a branch of Cleveland Public Library.
 54. "You Can Sing TV Ditty and Praise Life in City," *Plain Dealer*, June 6, 1974.
 55. See, for example, Greater Cleveland Growth Association advertisement: "The Best Things in Life Are Here," *Plain Dealer*, March 21, 1974.
 56. The Growth Association, with Cleveland Foundation funding, hired Lawrence A. Halprin & Associates, designers of San Francisco's famed Ghirardelli Square, to create a plan to revive public interest in downtown by focusing on quality-of-life improvements. See Julian Krawcheck, "Here's Expert's Cure for Downtown," *Cleveland Press*, April 12, 1973; David G. Molyneaux, "Downtown: Giant Pair of Civic Dice Being Rolled," *Plain Dealer*, August 13, 1975.
 57. Souther, "Acropolis of the Middle-West," 34-38.
 58. Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 6.
 59. "Murray Ohio, Union Agree in Transfer; Will Pay Severance, Pension Rights," *Plain Dealer*, February 22, 1957; Ted Princiotto, "Where to Now? Ask 450 Workers Who Lose Plant; Dixie-Bound Company Leaves Its Employees Sad and Confused," *Plain Dealer*, February 23, 1957.
 60. Bill Brown, "Cleveland Employment—Stability or Stagnation?," 1962, container 112, folder 1, Greater Cleveland Growth Association Records (hereafter GCGA), WRHS.
 61. Report of Brainstorming Session Held March 13, 1962, Greater Cleveland Growth Board Executive Committee Meeting, March 29, 1962, container 131, folder 5, GCGA; repr.: "What Your Wife Knows about Finding a Plant Site," Greater Cleveland Growth Board advertisement, *Wall Street Journal*, April 8, 1964, container 133, folder 2, GCGA; Junior League of Cleveland, Inc., repr.: "Enthusiasm," Greater Cleveland Growth Board advertisement, *Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 1964, container 133, folder 2, GCGA; *City of Broad Shoulders* (Cleveland: Junior League of Cleveland, 1963), n.p., vertical file, Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio (hereafter CSU).
 62. Repr.: "World Port," Greater Cleveland Growth Board advertisement, *Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 1963; repr.: "Creative Banking for Corporate Needs," National City Bank advertisement, *Wall Street*

- Journal*, March 26, 1963, both in container 132, folder 4, GCGA; repr: "Enjoy a Drought-Proof Plant Site," Greater Cleveland Growth Board advertisement, *Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 1964, Greater Cleveland Growth Board 1964 Annual Report, February 16, 1965, container 133, folder 10, GCGA; repr.: "New Big Shot," Greater Cleveland Growth Board advertisement, *Wall Street Journal*, May 8, 1963, container 132, folder 5, GCGA. The GCGB's 1964 annual report also made clear the close cooperation between the Growth Board other voices of the growth coalition, including the chamber of commerce and leading daily newspapers, utilities, and banks.
63. Minutes, Greater Cleveland Growth Board executive committee meeting, September 26, 1963, container 132, folder 7, GCGA.
 64. Minutes, Greater Cleveland Growth Board executive committee meeting, August 13, 1964, container 133, folder 5, GCGA.
 65. Repr.: "What Your Wife Knows about Finding a Plant Site." See also "Enthusiasm." While it is impossible to know the extent to which such marketing reshaped public conceptions of Cleveland, a survey of subscribers conducted by the *Wall Street Journal* in November 1964, after the ad campaign, found that 60 percent rated Cleveland a good or excellent site for business and industry but provided nothing more than GCGB's suggestion that the proportion represented an improvement. See Greater Cleveland Growth Board 1964 Annual Report.
 66. Carol Ann Poh, letter to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, September 22, 1974.
 67. Thomas W. Mooney, letter to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, October 19, 1974.
 68. *Cleveland: Turning Around* (Cleveland: New Cleveland Campaign, 1982), 4.
 69. Tom Green, "Special Lists for Listing City," *Plain Dealer*, January 1, 1979.
 70. William F. Miller, "Mistake by the Lake," *Plain Dealer*, November 27, 1978; Roy R. Walther, letter to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, November 28, 1977.
 71. Kingsley Guy, "Native Springs to City's Defense," *Plain Dealer*, January 10, 1979.
 72. Keith Karakul, letter to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, December 11, 1978; Betsy Herwerden, letter to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, January 10, 1979.
 73. Marvin Rosenberg and Ellen DelMonte, "Cleveland: A Base Case of Civic Schizophrenia," *Plain Dealer*, March 5, 1979.
 74. Michael Kilian, "A Very Bad Trip to Cleveland," *Chicago Tribune*, November 8, 1970, container 28, folder 497, CBS.
 75. Hal Lebovitz, "Hal Asks . . . Rally around What?," *Plain Dealer*, August 15, 1974.
 76. Tom Andrzejewski, "An Old Recruiter Recalls His Conventional Wars," *Plain Dealer*, October 23, 1985.
 77. Editorial: "Convention Problems," *Plain Dealer*, October 14, 1976; William F. Miller, "160,000 Shun City; Howley Calls Hotel Key," *Plain Dealer*, November 23, 1976; William F. Miller, "Brennan Giving Up Convention Bureau Helm," *Plain Dealer*, January 5, 1977.
 78. Joseph L. Wagner, "Kucinich Aims Plan to Boost City Image," *Plain Dealer*, October 23, 1977.
 79. Thomas Brazaitis, "Pitching Cleveland for National Conventions," *Plain Dealer*, December 30, 1979.
 80. "White Motor Headquarters Will Move to Detroit," *Cleveland Press*, September 27, 1979; Julie Wiernik, "Company's Exodus Cut Its Veteran Employees [sic] Adrift," *Plain Dealer*, September 19, 1979. Diamond Shamrock transferred operations to Houston; AM International (formerly Addressograph-Multigraph) moved to Los Angeles; Harris Corporation (formerly Harris-Intertype) departed for Melbourne, Florida; and White Motor left for Farmington Hills outside Detroit. Cities elsewhere were losing their hold on headquarters, but the trend was overwhelmingly a city-to-suburb phenomenon rather than a regional shift. Thus, while Cleveland shared in this experience, it also faced a painful loss of high-level corporate presence to locales in other states. See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 268-69.
 81. "CleveTrust Votes Change of Name to AmeriTrust Corp.; Shareholders Hit Loss of Cleveland Identity," *Plain Dealer*, October 19, 1979; AmeriTrust advertisement, *Plain Dealer*, November 16, 1979.
 82. Thomas V. H. Vail, interview by John P. DeWitt, tape 7, August 8, 1990, transcript, p. 2, container 4, folder 92, Thomas Vail Papers, WRHS.
 83. Ralph J. Perk, speech to Cleveland Rotary Club, n.d. [ca. 1976], container 31, folder 429, RJP; Jules Wagman, "Image Problem; Cleveland Firms Have Trouble Recruiting Executives," *Cleveland Press*, July 26, 1979.

84. "Vail Outlines Effort to Boost City Image," *Plain Dealer*, May 17, 1978.
85. *Cleveland: A New Generation* (Cleveland: New Cleveland Campaign, 1978), vertical file, CSU.
86. *Cleveland: A New Era*, special section in *Cleveland Magazine*, n.d. [ca. 1980], vertical file, CSU. Although the Greater Cleveland Growth Association sponsored the special section, its reference to a "new era" rhetorically echoed the New Cleveland Campaign's "new generation."
87. *Are There Any Civilized Cities Left? A View from Cleveland* (Cleveland: New Cleveland Campaign, 1982), cover, 1, in author's possession.
88. Thomas W. Gerdel, "Cleveland's New Image-Boosting Termed More Attuned to Times," *Plain Dealer*, January 29, 1978; Editorial: "All Should Support New Cleveland Drive," *Cleveland Press*, June 23, 1978; reprint of advertisement, *Cleveland* 9, no. 6 (June 1980), 9, box "Miscellaneous," folder "Greater Cleveland Growth Association," Commissioners File, CCA; *Will the U.S. Economy Still Lead the World in 1990?: An Emphatic YES from Cleveland* (Cleveland: New Cleveland Campaign, 1982), 4-5, 13, 15, Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland, Ohio; "Cleveland Ads Put on a Happy Face"; reprint of advertisement, *Cleveland* 9, no. 2 (February 1980), 14, box "Miscellaneous," folder "Greater Cleveland Growth Association," Commissioners File, CCA.
89. "Big Apple Is Given Burst of Our Plums," *Plain Dealer*, May 30, 1981; William J. Stern, letter to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, June 21, 1981; "Plum Promotion Wins a Week Here," *Plain Dealer*, May 31, 1981; Halle's advertisement, *Plain Dealer*, June 5, 1981; Mary Strassmeyer, "Mary, Mary," column, *Plain Dealer*, June 2, 1981.
90. Diamond Shamrock advertisement, *Plain Dealer*, June 8, 1981.
91. "Big Apple Is Given Burst of Our Plums."
92. Brian O'Connor, letter to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, February 11, 1982; William C. Rempel, "Cleveland Fights Years of Neglect; All-America City Now," *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 1982, container 4, folder 11, GVV; "Q: When Is a Plum a Prune? A: When the Mad Dogs Are on the Loose!," *Plain Press*, January 25, 1982. The Mad Dogs Bicycle Club, based on Cleveland's Near West Side, styled themselves the Greater Cleveland Shrinkage Association to parody the GCGA. Their two bumper stickers read "Cleveland's a Slum, and this silly plum campaign isn't doing a thing for it" and "If Cleveland's a Plum, no wonder the PD's the pits." The *Plain Press* was a grassroots newspaper based on Cleveland's Near West Side (Ohio City).
93. Letters to the editor, *Plain Dealer*, June 7, 21, 1981; Mary Strassmeyer, "Mary, Mary," column, *Plain Dealer*, January 26, 1982.
94. Brazaitis, "Pitching Cleveland for National Conventions"; "Having a Great Time, Wish You Were Here!," Convention and Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland, n.d. [ca. 1981]; "Cleveland. On America's North Coast," Convention and Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland, n.d. [ca. 1981], box "Miscellaneous (A-C)," folder "Convention and Visitors Bureau," Commissioners File, CCA.
95. William F. Miller, "\$250,000 Ad Campaign Boosts City as Tourist Spot," *Plain Dealer*, May 9, 1981.
96. Repr.: Shirley Davis, "They Call Cleveland 'Comeback City' Now," *Quad-City Times* (Davenport, Iowa), July 15, 1984; repr.: Barbara Klaus, "Yes! Cleveland!; The Town Once Called the 'Mistake on the Lake' Is Now 'Comeback City,'" *New York Daily News*, January 8, 1984, container 4, folder 11, GVV. See also reprints of Roberta A. Hubbard, "Colorful Fall in Cleveland," *Columbus Dispatch*, September 9, 1984; Hubbard, "Cleveland Looking Like Cultural Center; 'Mistake On Lake' Doing Itself Proud," *Wooster (Ohio) Daily Record*, October 5, 1984; Janet Filips, "Lively Cleveland's a Cache of Culture," *Dayton Daily News*, October 14, 1984; James G. Lubetkin, "Cleveland Helps You Celebrate," *Toronto Sun*, December 2, 1984; Vondell Petry, "Cleveland; Relishing Its Dynamic History While Striving for a Fresh Kind of Cosmopolitan Success, This Crossroads City Offers the Best of Both Worlds," *United*, January 1984, container 4, folder 11, GVV.
97. Klaus, "Yes! Cleveland!"
98. Tom Andrzejewski, "Trolley Tour Tours Top Town Attractions," *Plain Dealer*, May 1, 1985; Brian E. Albrecht, "In Search of the Elusive Cleveland Tourist," *Plain Dealer*, September 12, 1982.
99. Randy Youngman, "Dallas Writer's Jabs at Cleveland Stir Wave of Protest," *Plain Dealer*, May 17, 1981; Mary Strassmeyer, "Clevelanders Get Even, Talk Turkey to Texas Writer," *Plain Dealer*, May 19, 1981.
100. "Housing Values Rising Faster within City Limits vs. Suburbs," *Cleveland Today*, October 1983, container 4, folder 11, GVV.

101. See note 50.
102. Repr.: "Cleveland's Turnaround Has the Whole Country Talking," New Cleveland Campaign advertisement, n.d. [ca. 1983]; repr.: "Only Cleveland Gives You 9,000 Acres of Work Surrounded by 110,000 Acres of Play," New Cleveland Campaign advertisement, n.d. [ca. 1983]; repr.: "In Cleveland, Clean Waters Give New Breath of Life," *U.S. News & World Report*, June 18, 1984, container 4, folder 11, GVV.
103. "In Cleveland, Clean Waters Give New Breath of Life"; repr.: Eugene H. Methvin, "Cleveland Comes Back," *Reader's Digest*, March 1983, container 4, folder 11, GVV.
104. Richey Piiparinen and Anne Trubek, eds., *Rust Belt Chic: The Cleveland Anthology* (Cleveland: Rust Belt Chic Press, 2012), introduction; James Brasuell, "'This Is Cleveland' Rebranding Appeals to Millennials, Hipsters," *Planetizen*, March 22, 2014, <http://www.planetizen.com/node/67964>; Douglas J. Guth, "No 'Mistake' about It: Cleveland Launches New Rebranding Effort," *Fresh Water*, March 27, 2014, <http://www.freshwatercleveland.com/features/thisisclecampaign032714.aspx>.

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