

**An Urban Spatial Case Study of Post-industrial
Trenton: The Role & Rise of Nonprofit
Organizations**

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[Enter: Trenton, A Brief History]

Industry leaves. Jobs lost. Homes abandoned.



Lower Trenton Bridge. Photo by Chris Good. The Atlantic. ¹

As we sat in the backseat chairs of our van, our chauffeur Everett Barber, shared with us stories of his childhood growing up in what he told us was the once vibrant city of Trenton. Once a major center for the American Industrial Revolution in the early 1900s, Trenton adopted the slogan “Trenton Makes, The World Takes” on its Lower Trenton Bridge over the Delaware River in 1935; justifiably, the city was one of the country’s top fifty largest cities and possessed flourishing steel, ceramic, rubber, wire, rope, and linoleum industries. However, manufacturing began to decline rapidly in the mid-to-late 1900s.²

Trenton’s history as a post-industrial enclave plays a major role in its spatial as well as social setting – specifically, Trenton is a part of the Rust Belt, a term referring to states in the upper Northeast, the Great Lakes, and the Midwest that underwent urban

¹ Good, Chris. "Picture of the Day: Trenton Makes, the World Takes." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 04 Oct. 2011. Web. 01 May 2015.

² *Ibid.*,

decay, population loss, and economic decline due to the declination of once formidable industrial sectors.³ The Trenton Riots of 1968 was a major race riot in which a group of mainly young black men ransacked and burned down more than two hundred businesses in downtown Trenton in the aftermath following the assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. The insurance claims and settlements were not enough to cover the losses that many of the businesses suffered; losses were estimated to be around \$7 million, but the settlements and claims only came to \$2.5 million.⁴ Consequently, many of these businesses were never able to recuperate and departed Trenton permanently. With the loss of businesses, there befell the loss of jobs. As industries and jobs left, Trenton, and cities such as it, began to decline in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵

According to Steven Richman, “the major challenge [Trenton] faces is making those who work in Trenton want to live in Trenton”.⁶ The population began declining dramatically – “104, 638 people reflected in the 1970 census, and a 12 percent drop to 92,124 as per the 1980 census – the most dramatic drop in population, percentage-wise, since the first census capturing Trenton itself in 1810”. From 1940 to 1970, the state gained a net total of 1.36 million residents, however, from 1970 to 1990, the state lost about 250,000 residents through migration. Between 1990 to 1998, the state lost 350,000 additional residents due to domestic migration and gained 360,000 new residents from international migration. While ethnic populations – specifically Hispanic, Asian, and Black populations continued to rise – the white population departed cities like Trenton in

³ Crandall, Robert W. *The Continuing Decline of Manufacturing in the Rust Belt*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1993.

⁴ Cumbler, John T. 1989. *A Social History of Economic Decline: Business, Politics, and Work in Trenton*. Rutgers University Press, 283.

⁵ Cities in New Jersey that suffering from the same fate as Trenton include Camden and Newark.

⁶ Richman, Steven M. 2010. *Reconsidering Trenton: The Small City in the Post-Industrial Age*. McFarland, 3.

growing numbers, which became known as the white diaspora.⁷ The city is now even less populated in 2010 and one of the few cities in New Jersey that continues to shrink annually population-wise.⁸

As people continued to abandon their homes, businesses, and jobs in Trenton, the spatial and social setting of Trenton dramatically transformed from a city of robust industry and rapid modernization to one of derelict and disused landscapes mourning of golden times lost. The loss of many skilled laborer positions in which a predominantly white upper-middle class majority once held resulted in a market collapse since many ethnic and generally unskilled laborers could not fulfill the void created. The spatial setting of Trenton became representative of larger and more complex social ills – abandoned properties signaled the inability to afford homes and sustain a livelihood. Homeowners and renters could not feel connected to the neighborhoods and spaces they inhabited, resulting in a lack of compassion and connection for the spatial setting – and ultimately the deterioration, slowly, but surely, of the social fabric of Trenton.

[Enter: UIH Family Partners]

In New Jersey, there are a total of 63,249 non-profit organizations. However, Mercer County alone leads in the concentration of non-profit organizations with a total of 7,610 non-profit organizations.⁹ One of these non-profits is UIH Family Partners, a nonprofit organization located in the city of Trenton.

⁷ "New Jersey." *Worldmark Encyclopedia of the States*. Worldmark Encyclopedia of the States, 2007.

⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁹ Tax Exempt World. 2015. "New Jersey Nonprofit Organizations by County –\$77,470,217,342 in Assets" [online] *Taxexemptworld.com*. 12 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.taxexemptworld.com/organizations/new-jersey-counties.asp>. Essex and Bergen County place 2nd and 3rd respectively in the greatest number of nonprofit organizations by county.

Program Manager Carter Patterson of UIH Family Partners states that UIH is one of about an estimated 2,630 nonprofits within the Mercer County area that offers services to the community. According to the organization's official website and Patterson, UIH Family Partners was formed by a group of women "representing a Union of area churches" in 1859 who wished "to improve conditions for their city's most in-need and vulnerable young people". The group provided "educational and vocational training opportunities for youth growing up in an *increasingly industrial society* as well as a home for 'destitute children'" [emphasis mine].¹⁰ Patterson states, "the organization began to evolve, it morphed into a residential home for pregnant mothers and that lasted for about 20 to 25 years. Then in 1993, we became a father center and we deal exclusively with services for men". Known for many years as the Union Industrial Home for Children (UIH), the organization officially changed their name to "UIH Family Partners" in 2007. The goal of the organization today is to provide support and services for men and fathers: "men make mistakes, men need second chances," Patterson states.¹¹ According to the website, "this circle of empowerment has helped our community prevent domestic violence by providing education and intervention programs." While the specific demographics UIH has served has changed over the years – from an orphanage to a home for unwed mothers and children to currently a father center – the nonprofit's mission has nonetheless been to serve Mercer County's most destitute and vulnerable.

Nonprofit organizations can include not only those that service the community, but historical parks or museums, etc.

¹⁰ UIH Family Partners, "About," UIH Family Partners, last modified May 12, 2015, uihfamilypartners.org/about/.

¹¹ Patterson, Carter. "Interview with UIH's Program Manager Carter Patterson." Interview by author (Personal Interview). April 17, 2015.

[Scope: A Look at Trenton & UIH Family Partners]

“Heroin is everywhere”, Everett Barber, a chauffeur, stated this matter-of-factly after he had dropped us off on Princeton University’s campus after a visit to Trenton for our community-based learning initiative project.¹²

Trenton’s homicide rate – the number of homicides for each 100,000 people – is one of the worst in the country alongside bigger cities like Detroit, Newark, and Philadelphia.¹³ In addition, the city has one of the highest tax rates despite having the second lowest per capita income in the New Jersey state and one of the worst property rates.¹⁴ A majority of the residents, over 80 percent, are Black, African-American, and other ethnic minorities. The entire state of New Jersey has just a little over 14 percent of its entire population listed as Black or African-American and a large concentration of this percentage lies in Trenton. Trenton has a high vacancy rate and about two-thirds of residents rent their homes rather than own them. The population continues to shrink a bit every year. Heroin and crack cocaine have historically been and still are very visible drugs in Trenton in the present-day. Furthermore, according to a 2013 report by the Trenton Health Team, “healthcare quality and access continue to be suboptimal, especially for minority and low-income groups. While quality is improving, access and disparities are not.” Disparities still exist in access to care, quality and efficacy of care,

¹² Barber, Everett. "Interview with Everett." Interview by author. April 17, 2015.

¹³ Brown, Keith. 2014. “Trenton’s Surging Homicide Rate Is on Pace to Meet Last Year’s Record.” NJ.com| Times of Trenton. July 13.
http://www.nj.com/mercer/index.ssf/2014/07/trentons_surging_homicide_rate_is_on_pace_to_meet_last_years_record.html.

¹⁴ Duffy, Erin. 2015. “If Approved, Trenton Property Tax Hike Would Make the City’s Tax Rate the Highest in Mercer County.” NJ.com, *The Times of Trenton*. Accessed May 1.
http://www.nj.com/mercer/index.ssf/2012/10/if_approved_trenton_property_t.html.

and prevention.¹⁵ How are these flagrant disparities possible within twenty minutes of one of the richest zip codes in the United States?¹⁶ How does geography and spatial setting play into the physical, cultural, and racial alienation of communities in Trenton? What are the types of interventions in place to address these disparities?

I will primarily be focused on the unique social and spatial setting of Trenton, the post-industrial state capital of New Jersey, in contextualizing and examining the function of nonprofit organizations such as UIH Family Partners in addressing the needs of the very communities they serve. Concurrently, I will be addressing the question: how effective truly are these organizations and interventions within Trenton in tackling growing disparities?¹⁷ Although UIH provides services free of charge for all men and fathers in the neighboring community, most of their “clients”, as they refer to them, are predominantly Black or African-American. Additionally, approximately 90 percent of the clients have been formerly incarcerated.¹⁸ According to Paul Farmer, structural violence is embodied by the “adverse events” experienced by “people who live in poverty or are marginalized by racism, gender inequality, or a noxious mix of all of the above”.¹⁹ Not only will I be using the social and spatial setting of Trenton to examine the function and role of nonprofit organizations such as UIH, I will also be studying the historical processes of post-industrial Trenton and using it as a lens in order to discern persisting

¹⁵ Trenton Health Team, Community Health Needs Assessment Report. *Community Health Needs Assessment Report Trenton, New Jersey*. By Trenton Community Health Needs Assessment team. Trenton, New Jersey. Submitted to New Jersey Health Initiatives and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, July 2013. p.12

¹⁶ The zip code being referred to is Princeton.

¹⁷ Mercer County includes: East Windsor, Township of Ewing, Hamilton Township, Borough of Hightstown, Hopewell Borough, Hopewell Township, Lawrence Township, Pennington, Princeton, Township of Robbinsville, Trenton, West Windsor Township. There are 21 counties in the state of New Jersey.

¹⁸ "Interview with UIH's Program Manager Carter Patterson."

¹⁹ Farmer, Paul. 2010. "An Anthropology of Structural Violence." In *Partner to the Poor: A Paul Farmer Reader*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 308

challenges existing today. As noted by Farmer, “we cannot study structural violence without understanding history, the same can be said for biology.”²⁰

[UIH: The “Clients”]

“A lot of the guys that come through our father center are *broken* – they’re *reentering society from long periods of conviction* and they’re *reentering the real world from long periods of addiction and everything else in-between* [emphasis mine]”, Patterson explains.²¹ Not only have 90 percent of UIH’s clients been previously incarcerated, they were incarcerated mainly due to drug possessions and around 40 percent of the individuals are still battling some type of drug addiction. According to Patterson, heroin, crack cocaine, and alcohol are the “big three”; “it actually starts with alcohol, crack, and then heroin”, he lists in order, indicating a downward spiral of endless addiction in which alcohol is the gateway. Patterson’s remarks are reminiscent of Angela Garcia’s *The Pastoral Clinic* in which details the role of *chronicity* in the narrative of Alma and her heroin addiction in northern New Mexico’s Espanola Valley. Alma’s heroin addiction and overdose becomes a condition marked by endlessness – the impossibility and inevitability of an end.²² According to Garcia, “heroin offered her an ahistorical frame to finally asleep, but the various relational, cultural, and institutional processes in which she was embedded kept reminder her of the past”.²³ Garcia explores how “ongoing political, economic, cultural, and biological forces” and “wounds of recent history such as the Hispano dispossession from, and longing for, ancestral lands” and the

²⁰ Ibid., p.315 History must be used to analyze the “indissociable trio of anthropology, history and biology”.

²¹ “Interview with UIH’s Program Manager Carter Patterson.”

²² Garcia, Angela. 2013. “The Elegiac Addict.” In *Addiction Trajectories* edited by Eugene Raikhel and William Garriott. Durham: Duke University Press, p.38

²³ Ibid., p. 59

“fragmentation of social order and intimate life” in Alma’s life ultimately led her to her heroin overdose, exposing the “painful recognition that the future has been swallowed up by the past.”²⁴

This sense of dispossession and alienation can be felt not only in Alma’s narrative, but also within the social and spatial framework of the Trenton community. The history of post-industrial Trenton reveals a narrative of recurrent and continual loss – not only of buildings, social spaces, jobs, but also of people. Many public recreational spaces and businesses such as theaters or restaurants disappeared after the riots.²⁵ The loss of recreational spaces and increasing number of abandoned buildings contributed to the deterioration of the social and urban fabric of Trenton making it difficult for residents to establish a sense of community or solidarity with one another. Heroin and crack cocaine, as also emphasized by historian Eric Schneider, offered alternatives means to earning a living and escaping an oppressive reality. These drugs began threatening the community in the late 1960s; a new type of market arose – open-air drug markets, which referred to the lack of barriers to access and purchase of drugs such as heroin by any potential consumer/buyer. Open-air drug markets meant that drug transactions were much more public and visible as drug transactions often occurred in public or in economically depressed neighborhoods such as housing projects. The abandoned properties of Trenton served as ideal locations for drug transactions as many of these transactions occurred also within abandoned properties.²⁶ When we had returned to Princeton’s campus from our visit to UIH, Everett informed me, before I got off the van, that he had witnessed a

²⁴ Ibid., p.38, 59

²⁵ Ibid., *Interview with Everett*.

²⁶ Schneider, Eric C. 2008. *Smack: Heroin and the American City*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

heroin transaction occur in front of the doors of the building in which the organization was situated.

“It was either cover them or lose the arm”, Everett explained referring to the gang tattoos, which had been hidden by his long-sleeved button-up shirt, he acquired when he was once a part of a motorcycle gang involved in distributing drugs such as meth, crack, and heroin.²⁷ Everett’s history of involvement with a gang and his involvement with drugs as he grew up in Trenton is a typical trend in many youths beginning in the 1970s that still exists even in much of the community today. In a post-industrial city such as Trenton, in which poor ethnic communities are competing for a limited number of jobs or unable to obtain the skills necessary to compete in the marketplace, becoming involved with drugs or with gangs involved in the distribution of drugs were natural alternatives in order to survive and deal with the social frustrations and systemic forms of discrimination they faced. According to Attorney General Chris Christie, now currently the governor of New Jersey, in a press release from 2005, escalating gang violence in Trenton has made the city a shooting range. Christie noted that “the sub-culture of violent gangs and drug dealers that have become more and more brazen in Trenton” and that “by taking down the leadership of these gangs, we are hoping to make the streets of this city safer for everyone”.²⁸ According to the National Drug Intelligence Center Director Michael Horn, “outlaw motorcycle gangs such as the Pagans and Warlocks are the primary wholesale distributors” of drugs and these criminal groups frequently control cut houses, storefronts, and open-air drug markets in Trenton, Camden,

²⁷ *Interview with Everett*

²⁸ Attorney General's "Gangs, Guns & Drugs" Initiative Targets Trenton "Bloods" Gang and Cocaine Trade "Operation Capital City" Yields 16 Arrests by Division of Criminal Justice, Trenton P.D., Mercer County Prosecutor's Office, U.S. DEA & Other Agencies

and Newark.²⁹ Youth involvement and membership in nearby gangs is still increasingly popular. Gangs offered a sense of community and a break from the alienation experienced by most of these teens.

[Meeting Jonathan]

“The way you look dictates how you get the job”, Jonathan said. Jonathan, a client of UIH, is twenty-nine years old and discussed the need for a dental and oral hygiene program to be offered by UIH. Jonathan’s parents remain in prison, he grew up in the foster care system, he has no criminal record and has earned a college degree, facts that already set him apart from the majority of the men who seek services at UIH. Jonathan has lived in numerous places, such as New York, Atlanta, and South Carolina, in pursuit of a job. However, he is currently unemployed and unable to find employment due to his low self-esteem, which stems from his rotting teeth. Oral hygiene could never have been a priority concern for him as he grew up in the foster care system and there lacked routine in his daily life. In addition, Jonathan and the rest of the clients in UIH do not have proper access to dental care because they cannot afford to pay for the deductible required of them even with insurance.³⁰ Furthermore, according to Patterson, there are hardly any dentists in the area willing to work pro-bono. Despite the fact that there is a private dental clinic situated right next door to UIH, there are only two (one of which may no longer exist) dental clinics that offer some type of free dental cleaning service to those who cannot afford it revealing a form of structural violence which “continues to

²⁹ State of New Jersey Commission of Investigation. *The Changing Face of ORGANIZED CRIME IN NEW JERSEY: A Status Report*. State of New Jersey Commission of Investigation. Trenton, New Jersey.: U.S. United States. State Publication. May 2004.

³⁰ Jonathan. “Interview with an UIH client: Jonathan”. Interview by author (Personal Interview). April 17th, 2015

play itself out in the daily lives and deaths of the part of the population living in poverty”.³¹

[Trenton Today]

The continuously escalating rate of crime present today that began in the 1960s is a consequence of the transition of Trenton to a post-industrial society –providing fewer jobs and learning opportunities for the poorly trained. Systemic policies in place to contain drugs such as heroin and cocaine have only resulted in “Cradle to Prison Pipeline” in which those born in economically depressed areas such as Trenton, mainly ethnic minorities such as Black or African-Americans or Latinos, face challenges that make it impossible to ever catch up in terms of economic security and well-being; Rather than contain drugs, these policies have only contained people – specifically, the already disadvantaged.³² Using and examining the social and spatial setting of post-industrial Trenton and its influence on UIH, we see that Trenton’s social history and the challenges that still persist today in the city state’s suppression of violence, attempts to service its ethnic and most oppressed populations, are not so unlike other postindustrial cities like Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, etc. that sit on the periphery of human existence and sight. These cities are the stories of populations up-rooted and that remain up-rooted – in a state of impermanence and transience – unable to find or seek refuge from the community around them or feel a sense of rootedness in their environment or the justice system. The urban ghettos and disparate housing projects intermixed with abandoned homes and buildings only lead to growing numbers of the alienated and unemployable young adults.

³¹ “*An Anthropology of Structural Violence.*” p. 311

³² “Talk DISD.” 2015. *ScribbleLive Embed*. Accessed May 1. http://live.dallasnews.com/Event/Talk_DISD.

Whenever there is a concentration of minorities, there are always policies that seek to contain, monitor, and confine their agency. As Schneider puts it, “the urban crisis of the late twentieth century was rooted in numerous decisions made over the previous twenty-five years: by residents choosing to abandon old neighborhoods in the face of new migrants, by bankers deciding to withdraw capita from the urban core and invest it in the periphery, by politicians and government officials inaugurating federal programs that created a white suburban middle class while reinforcing urban apartheid, and by businessmen moving jobs out of the city, to the South and to the West, and eventually out of the country altogether”.³³ These systems of structural violence are still present today and in nonprofit organizations such as UIH that although attempts to provide services for the most vulnerable population are unable to actually effect prolonged change which can only occur by changing the culture and mindset of the community. The community of Trenton is interesting in the sense that it has become somewhat of a moral laboratory – in which nonprofit organizations operate, community-based health workers attend to, and elite research institutions such as Princeton University visit in order to show and study what is wrong with society and the prevalent social ills while not exactly addressing the real needs of the community which run historically deep.

[The Role of Nonprofit Organizations & its Implications]

Patterson estimated that there are 2,630 nonprofits in Mercer County, which he explains is “ridiculous on some levels because then everyone operates in a silo and they’re not interconnected at all because a lot of times the funders dictate who you’re supposed to be helping”; additionally, “[the nonprofits are] very specific” which is

³³ *Smack: Heroin and the American City*, ix.

problematic according to Patterson, who critiques, “you have all of these silos and nobody is talking to each other”. These nonprofit organizations, which tend to specific target demographics, in many ways are increasingly becoming as well “the medical agent for the state” in places of economic scarcity.³⁴ Although UIH and nonprofit organizations such as it are beneficial because they create a community and an avenue for specific marginalized groups to seek services, they also run the risk of becoming too specialized and set in their own specific silo, which would result in greater disparity in terms of services provided to racially marginalized communities. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes stated before, what is needed is a “moral reflection on a human society forced to the margins” and a political text that “indicts a political economic order that reproduces sickness and health at its very base.”³⁵ Additionally, these nonprofit organizations create a “moral economy still geared to pinning praise or blame on individual actors” while at the same time “enabling conditions of structures that are both ‘sinful’ and ostensibly ‘nobody’s fault.’”³⁶ This type of mentality shifts the blame and ultimately, no one can be held responsible.

In conclusion, a large number of racial and ethnic minorities often return or migrate to post industrial cities like Trenton; within these particular Rust Belt cities crime rates only continue to skyrocket and the population continues to decline. Drugs such as heroin and cocaine were alternative pathways to becoming self-made entrepreneurs; in addition, initiation into drug gangs provided a sense of community from the alienation one faced in the surrounding environment of Trenton. The spatial setting of Trenton, its

³⁴ Biehl, João. 2005. *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 22

³⁵ Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1992. *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press p.30

social history, and urban decay pushed groups away from one another. A drug subculture is “rooted in physical spaces that sustain it and allow it to flourish and continue over time”. The spatiality to drug use and to the transmission of ‘drug knowledge’ that occurred within the few social spaces available in Trenton largely occurred in abandoned buildings or gang headquarters. A drug culture has continued to sustain itself to the present-day because of the drug subculture created and perpetuated by gangs as well as the spatial settings of Trenton itself. This subculture will continue to thrive as long as discriminatory drug policies, such as zoning policies or anti-drug enforcement operations, continue to contain, prejudice, and segregate the socially and economically marginal creating additional zones of social abandonment. Trenton is still split on ethnic, racial, and cultural divides – the struggles of the local government, the spatial divides between neighborhoods, the numerous nonprofit organizations, and municipal groups are all meant to address the differing needs of groups along these divides. Rather than targeting specific demographics of clients, we should address the social and spatial settings that produce disparities via interstitial politics – specifically approaching processes and issues at the spaces or cracks of other dominant forms of power and looking at how spaces of social empowerment may be formed instead between communities at the intersections of different marginalized identities.

Appendix

[In Tandem: Heroin and Crack]

(An interesting historical article to share that touches upon drug interactions within Trenton)

4th city campout tries to send tough message

By EMILY J. HORNADAY
Staff Writer

TRENTON — Organizers of the fourth anti-drug campout held on Union and Asbury streets in the city last night had a message for would-be drug buyers who live in nearby Pennsylvania but cross the river to make their purchases in South Trenton.

"The message is: Don't do it, stay home. We want you out of our community," said Bob James, a member of the Grassroots Movement, which organized the encampment.

The campout brought out police barricades at 5 p.m. yesterday, blocking Union and Asbury streets at Ferry and Furman streets.

"If we can diffuse the drug traffic brought in by the Trenton Makes Bridge, we can diffuse the drug problem in South Trenton," James said.

The goal of the campouts is to allow only residential traffic into the neighborhoods to demonstrate that when citizens unite, they can drive out illegal drug activity that has plagued their community and riddled the area with violent

crime, said Shahid Watson, campout organizer.

WATSON SAID Grassroots members sweeping the Union Triangle Park prior to the campout, found a used syringe, a razor blade and several empty vials of crack cocaine.

"All that it takes is for a baby to pick this (needle) thing up, stick somebody and maybe infect them with AIDS," Watson said.

Calling the area a "heroin park" Watson echoed the sentiment expressed by James and said many residents of Morrisville, Pa., travel to the area to buy drugs.

"This is just disgusting," Watson said, pointing to the used syringe. "This is a park where babies play."

Watson, and many residents along the street, said they feel South Trenton is a forgotten neighborhood with drug problems that need to be addressed.

Herman Gaynor, 26, who has lived in the neighborhood all of his life, said drugs are destroying everything.

"IT'S A FATAL attraction in the black community," he said.

James agreed but added that serious drug problems cross racial

and economic boundaries and can be found in every neighborhood.

"There are bad drug problems in Chambersburg, too, but with a difference. There, the drug use is done inside the homes. Here, it's out on the street," James said.

Mayor Arthur J. Holland, who visited the campout, said the events have been positive, and he hopes some lasting good will come from them.

"It is the ultimate in partnerships between the members of the community and the city," he said.

But the anti-drug message was a hard sell at a housing project on Union Street, where teenagers reportedly hawk drugs to passing motorists day in and day out.

"WHAT DO YOU tell a mother getting about a \$400-a-month subsidy whose juvenile son can make more in one week selling drugs?" James asked.

Watson noted a market in the area sells razor blades — used to cut cocaine and other drugs — from large glass containers because the demand is so great.

"In this neighborhood, instead of buying bubble gum, the kids are buying razor blades," Watson said.

An article from August 5th, 1989. Written by staff writer Emily Hornaday in The Trenton Evening Times, also known as The Times, Hornaday details a fourth campout organized by community members in protest of drug transactions occurring in residential public spaces.³⁷

Written by staff writer Emily Hornaday, an August 1989 article from the *Trenton Evening Times* details the fourth anti-drug campout organized by protestors from the Grassroots Movement. According to the article, the protestors' campout was held on Union and Asbury streets in Trenton and was meant as a message for "would-be drug buyers who live in nearby Pennsylvania but cross the river to make their purchases in South Trenton". According to Bob

³⁷ Hornaday, Emily J. "4th City Campout Tries to Send Tough Message." *Trenton Evening Times*, August 5, 1989.

James, a member of the movement organizing the encampment, “The message is: Don’t do it, stay home. We want you out of our community”. James’ statement illuminates the response of Trenton community members to the visible pervasive influence of crack cocaine and heroin on the streets by addicts. The fact that residents from nearby Pennsylvania would travel to the South Trenton area to purchase drugs reveals the extent of the drug marketplace network. James added, “if we can diffuse the drug traffic brought in by the Trenton Makes Bridge, we can diffuse the drug problem in South Trenton”.³⁸ Campout organizer Shahid Watson explains in the article “the goal of campouts is to allow only residential traffic into the neighborhoods to demonstrate that when citizens unite, they can drive out illegal drug activity that has plagued their community and riddled the area with violent crime”. The article reveals many of the collective community efforts to combat the widespread and very public usage of drugs and its harmful consequences on the neighborhood and youth – specifically by targeting the source of the drugs (rather than the social settings of the users themselves).³⁹ It is important to note that many public recreational spaces and businesses such as theaters or restaurants disappeared after the riots.⁴⁰ The loss of recreational spaces and increasing number of abandoned buildings contributed to the deterioration of the social and urban fabric of Trenton and made it difficult for residents to establish a sense of community or solidarity with one another. However, as evidenced by this article, when it came to the issue of drugs especially in one of the few parks leftover in Trenton, it was seen as a collective “war” that needed to be battled as a community.

The organizers within this article reveal concerns of drugs such as heroin and crack cocaine on the youth. The organizers describe “[finding] a used syringe, a razor blade and several empty vials of crack cocaine” in the midst of the Union Triangle Park prior to camping out. “All that it takes is for a baby to pick this (needle) thing up, stick somebody and maybe infect them with AIDS,” says Watson in addition to calling the area a “heroin park”, revealing again how the

³⁸ Ibid.,

³⁹ Ibid.,

⁴⁰ Ibid., *Interview with Everett.*

spatial setting of recreational spaces in Trenton have become associated and entangled with the insidious visibility and market transaction of threatening substances such as heroin and cocaine. Watson emphasizes throughout the article, ““this is a park where babies play””. Watson and others explain, “South Trenton is a *forgotten neighborhood* with drug problems that need to be addressed” [emphasis mine]. Another young man in the article Herman Gaynor, age 26, states that drugs are destroying everything. Gaynor states, ““It’s a fatal attraction in the black community””. James explains, ““There are bad drug problems in Chambersburg, too, but with a difference. There, the drug use is done inside the home. Here, it’s on the street””. Individuals such as James reveal the effect of drugs on erasing the demarcations between public and private spaces and the impact of open-air drug market transactions in neighborhoods within Trenton. Vials of crack and used syringes in parks and recreational spaces were visible, everyday reminders of neighborhood decay. Moreover, individuals such as Gaynor reveal the association between the use of drugs with members of the black community, noting that there must be a “fatal attraction”, allocating blame on the race of the individual user rather than looking at other social and environmental factors.



Union Triangle Park, Trenton. In the photo above, grassroots movement organizer Shahid Watson points to a used syringe and other drug paraphernalia found in the Union Triangle Park in Trenton.⁴¹

The group describes another instance in which they witnessed teenagers “[hawking] drugs to passing motorists day in and day out” in a housing project on Union Street. James is quoted asking, ““WHAT DO YOU tell a mother getting about a \$400-a-month subsidy whose juvenile son can make more in one week selling drugs?”” drawing attention to the fact that many members within these low-income communities resorted to distributing drugs as another source of income. In a post-industrial city such as Trenton, in which poor ethnic communities are competing for a limited number of jobs or unable to obtain the skills necessary to compete in the marketplace, becoming involved with drugs or with gangs involved in the distribution of drugs were natural last resorts in order to survive and deal with the social frustrations and systemic forms of discrimination they faced. “Watson noted a market in the area sells razor blades – used to cut cocaine and other drugs ... because the demand is so great”, revealing how communities built themselves around the drug economy and the concept of supply and demand. “In this neighborhood, instead of buying bubble gum, the kids are buying razor blades”, says Watson. Another article titled “Dragnet snares 28 in city” details the seizing of drugs and arrest of 28

⁴¹ “4th City Campout Tries to Send Tough Message”. *Trenton Evening Times*

people, including eight juveniles, from Trenton in an “8-hour Operation Triad sweep”.⁴² In both articles, what is emphasized is the susceptibility of the youth in becoming involved with drugs and drug operations.

⁴²Trenton Evening Times. "Dragnet snares 28 in city." *Trenton Evening Times*, August 5, 1989.

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I pledge my honor that this paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

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