

# Looking Back: Ten Years After Riots



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On April 7, 2001, Timothy Thomas was shot and killed after running from police in Over-The-Rhine. Thomas was African-American. He was unarmed.

Police Officer Stephen Roach, who shot Thomas, was white.

Within days, anger in the community boiled over into rioting, forcing a city-wide curfew and state of emergency. The riots prompted major changes in the police department and time has dramatically changed the neighborhood. But is the city a better place?

Local 12's Joe Webb has been asking that question.

Opinions vary depending on who you ask. All agree that Over-The-Rhine looks much better. Most agree that the police have a much different relationship with the community. Some key players then... say it is better now. Others aren't so sure.

Just a block from 13th and Republic, where Timothy Thomas died, a handful of people met to pray and remember him this afternoon. The balloons they launched floated above a Vine Street that has changed a lot in 10 years. Now home to trendy new bars and restaurants, this part of Over-The-Rhine has healed and prospered since the riots, but some say the looks may deceive.

Pastor Rob Dothard, The Lord's Gym: "I say so many times, we can change the outlook of a community, new buildings, renovated, getting new people in here. But if their HEART hasn't changed, we're going to have the same old stuff."

Dothard was on the front lines of the unrest. His Lord's Gym sat directly across Race Street from the major battle line between police and protesters. He's seen improvement since then, but says not everyone agrees with him.

"Talking with a lot of people, there's a lot of mixed feelings, lot of mixed feelings. A lot of people feel like it's changed and a lot of people don't feel like it's changed."

"The memories are vivid, so it doesn't seem like 10 years to me."

Former Mayor Charlie Luken declared the state of emergency and curfew. He says the issues that sparked the unrest had been building for years. He sees dramatic changes in police policy, training and attitude.

Charlie Luken, Former Mayor: "We now have a Citizens Complaint Authority where people can go if they have a complaint against an officer, we have mental health training, so if someone's got a brick they don't pull out their gun. We have tasers, which have dramatically decreased the number of shootings involving police, both at police and by police."

Luken credits recently-retired Police Chief Tom Streicher for making officers more like ambassadors to the community. Changes have come, but some things have not changed. The schism exaggerated by the riots is still there... not always on the surface.

Vanessa Sparks, Neighborhood Activist: "Until the playing field is level and until we communicate with each other from a human rights perspective, we're always going to have a gap between the haves and have nots."

"That part of the problem for Cincinnati and the United States of America continues to simmer."

Luken says he might still be in politics if it hadn't been for the riots. He was in office for five years after the disturbances and says it just wore him down.

You can't tie the development changes to the riots, but there's no denying that Vine Street, from Central Parkway to Liberty is enjoying a rebirth.

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The Collaborative Agreement between the police department and community groups was one of the changes that followed the riots. The court order that created the agreement says it was designed to help different groups in Cincinnati work together more closely on common goals. The American Civil Liberties Union calls the collaborative one of the most innovative plans ever devised to improve police-community relations.

### **Findlay Market... Ten Years After**

Much of Over-The-Rhine was in shambles, including the historic Findlay Market. The riots were sparked by the shooting of Timothy Thomas, who was shot ten years ago today. The violence drove some businesses out of town, but other owners stuck it out.

Rich Jaffe shares more from Findlay Market with a look back and into the future.

No-one's going to tell you this neighborhood's completely out of the woods yet, but life and business here is certainly miles beyond where we were ten years ago. Findlay Market is definitely a place where the beat goes on, but some here can look back on a time when things were not nearly so vibrant.

Ten years ago, as sporadic violence began to gnaw its way through Over-The-Rhine, Bryan Madison turned on the 11 o'clock news and saw his produce store on fire. The next day, he and wife, Carolyn, found devastation and dedication to coming back better than ever.

Bryan Madison, Business Owner: "When we re-opened two weeks later, after the fires and everything, and the market re-opened, we got 40 cases of lemons and everybody that came down that day we gave them a lemon, our statement was, well if life gives you a lemon, you make lemonade out of it."

And so they have, Madison's and the entire Findlay Market have come back full, fresh, and brighter than ever. Chef's, vendors, cooks, and bakers now sell everything here from gyro's to meat, spices, flowers and locally grown produce. At Fresh Table you can buy as many as 50 fully prepared dishes, sold by the pound. Chefs here just celebrated the shops 6 month anniversary.

Meredith Trombly, Business Owner: "We knew we wanted to be at Findlay, knew we wanted to be inside the market house, love the energy, love the feel of it, love the whole gamut of people you can find down here in Cincinnati and we thought the Market House would be ready for the full menu that we're doing."

Is it perfect here? No...but business owners at the market have learned it's a place where painful wounds can heal.

"It's all better. I think all you have to do is walk through Findlay market, and if people haven't been down here, they really can't imagine the growth that's taken place with Findlay Market in the last ten years."

Findlay Market rebirth has to do with a concerted effort here to be not just more community-friendly but more earth friendly, too. There are now solar panels on top of the market house, and many of these vendors compost what they have left over at the end of the day. Once the growing season starts, they'll also be selling produce here that's grown in urban food plots just a few blocks away.

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