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Narrative of Flight: Camden, New Jersey in the Post-War Era

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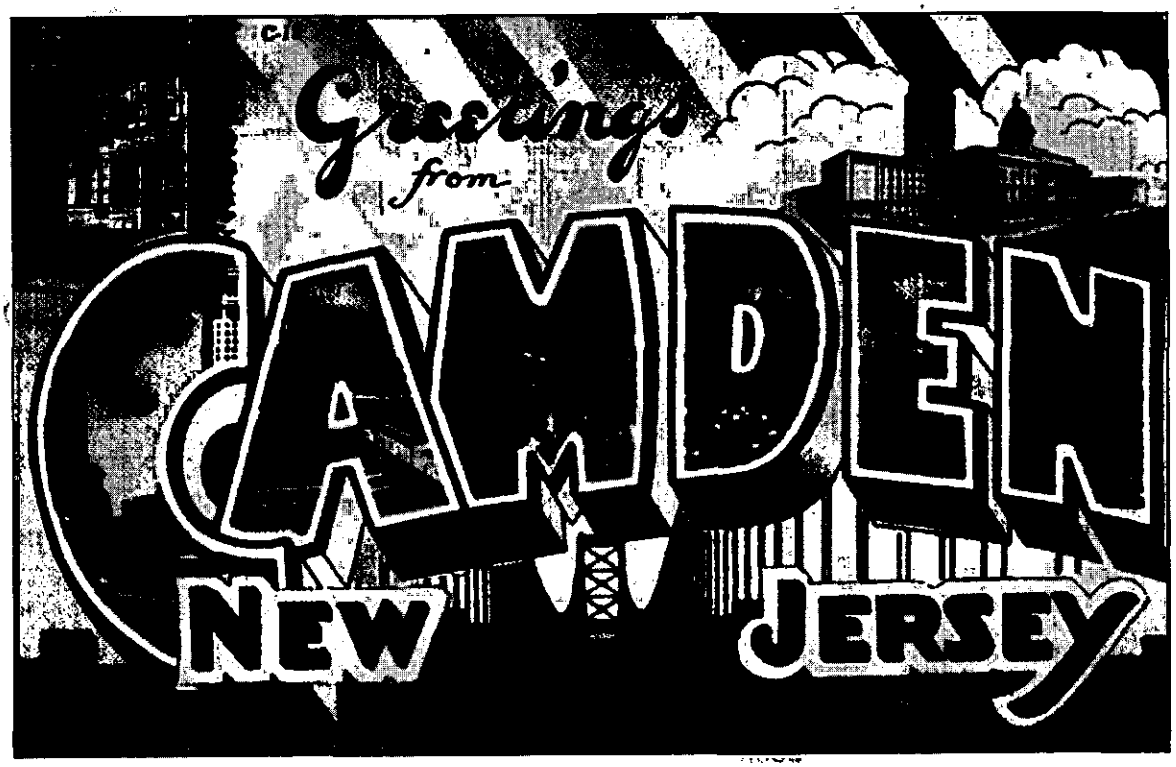

By
Chuck Hovanic

Introduction

Commuters boarding the Speed Line in the small town of Lindenwold, New Jersey witness a rapid change in landscape as their train whisks them towards Philadelphia. Each stop on the train represents a distinct stage of suburban development, ranging from the sprawling McMansions of Voorhees to the tightly packed two-family houses of Collingswood. The passengers that board at the various stations accurately represent the demographics of each town. This broad range of people is treated to a memorable, yet brief glimpse of poverty when the train enters the City of Camden. Gliding above decaying row homes and empty streets, passengers stare at the most dangerous city in America from the relative safety of the train. This fleeting encounter with Camden that is witnessed daily by thousands of South Jersey residents, represents the extent to which most people interact with this embattled city. Only memories, told by the grandparents and parents of these commuters, serve to illustrate the Camden that once was.

My interest in Camden stretches back to my childhood. As a South Jersey native, I grew up just thirty minutes away from the city in suburban Medford. I infrequently ventured to the city's waterfront district to visit the battleship *New Jersey*, the Campbell's Field baseball stadium, and the Adventure Aquarium. However, the rest of Camden was just a place to pass through on one's way to Philadelphia. As I grew older, I was made to understand that Camden was a place of crime, poverty, and blacks. It was the ghetto. It was this portrayal of Camden that first fascinated me. How was an *American* city so dangerous that one could not even drive through its streets? From this question stemmed

many others. How could a place where stray bullets killed kids exist so close to the hometown of my happy childhood? Over time, this inequality grew even more apparent to me. I can recall a singular moment when I became acutely aware of this inequality. I was driving on my way to Philadelphia via a local highway. Leaving Pennsauken Township and entering the City of Camden, the landscape abruptly changes. Instead of single-family homes and strip malls, the ubiquitous empty lots and abandoned row homes suddenly appear. I had driven this route many times before, but I never realized how drastic and rapid the change in scenery really was. I was shocked that a mere political boundary could demarcate a ghetto from a suburb. From that point forward, I became increasingly inquisitive into how Camden became Camden. I volunteered at a charter school in Camden, shocked to see that children my brother's age lacked the learning skills he had cultivated years before. Ultimately, I learned a lot more about my own perception of the city than the city itself. I began to realize that throughout my childhood and adolescence I had been socialized to associate Camden with blacks, crime, and fear. In fact, these four terms are essentially interchangeable in the minds of most people in South Jersey. Thus, I now look to understand the stories of those who once lived in Camden to ultimately unearth the factors that shaped my view of it,

To Camdenites of the years stretching between 1940 and 1980, the Camden of today is an entirely different city. The neighborhoods, factories, and commerce of yesteryear were dramatically ripped from under their feet and replaced by an alien environment of fear. This fall from grace is in no way unique to the City of Camden. Middle class residents of cities across America took part in the massive demographic shift known as white flight and moved to the suburbs. Nonetheless, the causes behind

these changes remain contested and controversial. Using Camden as an example, one begins to understand how white flight affected white ethnics and their perception of the city. Regardless of their accuracy, these opinions offer us a crucial perspective on a period that has greatly shaped the modern American city.

By interviewing former Camden residents, one is able to reconstruct the city as seen through the eyes of people of various ethnicities, economic backgrounds, and neighborhoods. Some common themes emerge from these testimonies, allowing us to begin to understand how white, working class Camdenites dealt with the transformation of their city. With this information in mind, I will divide this work into two sections. The first will follow a narrative format using the testimonies of the interviewees, with chapters detailing on "Old" Camden and the flight from the city. Subsequently, I will divide the second section into chapters focusing on five major themes that emerge when analyzing residents' perceptions of Camden: Progress, Race, Family, Fear, and Nostalgia. Ultimately, I will end with the Camden of today and what ex-Camdenites see for its future.

Part I

Old Camden

In 1940, a roar of motorcycles was heard rushing down Broadway. Crowds had gathered on the sidewalks as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt approached the New York Ship Building Corporation's shipyard on the foot of the Delaware River. As the United States became increasingly embroiled in the affairs of a Europe torn by war,

Roosevelt's campaign stop at one of the most productive shipyards on the eastern seaboard was unsurprising. The visit went smoothly and the president returned to the city four years later to campaign again. However, Camden did not see another presidential visitor until 1992 when Bill Clinton stopped in the beleaguered city as part of a campaign effort to promote his programs aimed at urban renewal. In the forty-eight years between Roosevelt and Clinton's visits, the city had transformed from a source of national pride to a shameful blemish.

"Camden was beautiful," Antonio, a shopkeeper in North Camden stated with conviction. Spread out over ten square miles, the city was home to 124,555 people at its peak in 1950.[1] Camden stretched northward, southward, and eastward from its downtown locus of business, industry, and government that sat on the Delaware River. As one traveled away from Center City, the housing stock generally transitioned from older, tightly packed row houses to single-family houses and newer construction. The city was overwhelmingly working class. "I don't know if we were or not, but nobody felt poor," Sally, an East Camden woman recalled. Nonetheless each neighborhood was distinct in its housing quality as well as in the ethnicity and income of the people housed there. Stating that you were from Whitman Park implied something entirely different than claiming to live in Parkside. Many of the city's residents can still describe in detail the character of each of the city's neighborhoods. According to former Camden County Superior Court Judge Smith _____,

> "Whitman Park was Pollock Town. If you were running for office, you ran in its Pulaski Day Parade...Fairview had Irish and others. In Westfield Acres, there were a lot of blue-collar Irish as well. Nobody that lived there had a lot of

[1] Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*, 42.

money...South Camden was a classic Italian neighborhood. It was pretty religious, but had beautiful girls...North Camden was the Hispanic center because *Campbell's Soup had brought them in...The black community was in Centerville* in southwest Camden."

While each resident may have perceived each neighborhood somewhat differently, the persistence of such detailed accounts of the ethnic and economic make up of specific areas points to the significance of neighborhood identity in Camden. Your neighborhood was not only an indication to others' of how they should perceive you, but it facilitated your own sense of ethnicity and community as well.

Jack, a 1972 graduate of Woodrow Wilson High School, remembers his German neighborhood of Cramer Hill and its hardworking people. As a child, he remembers the distinct food and large wedding celebrations of his largely German neighborhood. Although not German himself, he nonetheless recalls his neighbors' visible assertion of their cultural identity. However, Cramer Hill was not unique in this sense. Relatively well-off Parkside, for instance, had enough Jewish residents to warrant two synagogues and a Hebrew school, and Whitman Park had "Polish St. Joseph's Cathedral," a popular Veterans of Foreign Wars post, and the Polish-American Citizens Club. According to Howard Gillette in his work *Camden After the Fall*, "participants in these worlds remained parochial and isolated from other communities. Each unit of the urban fabric thus held strongly unto itself, recognizing other units but keeping a distance."[2] Regardless of their make up, all of these neighborhoods were stable communities that nurtured the growth and development of generations of working class Camdenites.

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[2] Howard Gillette, *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 29.

These neighborhoods and their streets were the setting for the day-to-day activities that make up the memories of Camdenites. Antonio, the shopkeeper in North Camden, fondly remembers his adolescence as one of freedom and adventure. "Thousands of people would hang outside of RCA all night long. I would walk home around 1:45 and put all of my money on the table, but I'd be up for school at quarter to seven. Kids were tough then...My mother didn't even know what school I went to." Many of the city's residents recall how each neighborhood was self-sustaining, further strengthening community identity. Jane, a 1958 graduate of Woodrow Wilson High School, remembers moving into East Camden when her street was still unpaved. Growing up, "most of the things that were important to us were close and easy to get to. It was a safe environment. I could walk down our own street to the corner store, church, and school. I felt very happy and safe." Self-policing, tightly knit social networks developed within these insular communities. According to Bill, a resident of the Anthony Park Homes public housing complex,

> "I can tell you names. You remember these peoples' names because they made an impression on you. [Even] if they were the old hag of the neighborhood. I can tell you the strange people, the normal people, the firemen, the policemen, the tax assessor. Because they meant something to us, and we meant something to them...That's the kind of people that was there. Everybody cared for one another. Everybody knows your name. [They would say] 'I'm going to tell your mother!' And they would tell your mother!"

While one's neighborhood was important in developing a sense of community identity, the block was the most basic level of social organization in Camden. Chris, a resident of the 2800 block of Arthur Avenue recalled; "You had great neighbors. Even if you didn't

personally know them, they knew what house you lived in. If there were problems, you were covered." All residents interviewed, regardless of their neighborhood, seem to recall their communities as a sort of extended family that was crucial to their development as an individual.

However insular and distinct these neighborhoods may have been, downtown Camden served as an anchor that drew in people from the neighborhoods and suburbs on a daily basis. As Michael Johns states in *Moment of Grace: The American City in the 1950s*, "downtown united a city whose neighborhoods, wrote E. B. White in 1949, were each 'a city within a city.'"[3] As Jane, a resident of East Camden put it,

> "[Our neighborhood] had small stores, a grocer, a tailor. Westfield Avenue was ten blocks away with bigger shops, a 5 & 10, a clothing store, grocery stores, and movie theatres. We would go there from our neighborhood once a week. Even less frequently we had to go downtown to pay taxes and bills and buy school clothes. Downtown had banks, as well as [the stores] J.C. Penney's, Lit Brothers, and Sears."

Downtown essentially operated at the top of a hierarchy of commercial districts located in every corner of the city. Therefore, going downtown "was like an excursion," said Sally, another East Camden resident. Even if their had been parking spaces available on the bustling streets of downtown, most families in Camden owned only one car and were therefore reliant on public transportation to get downtown. When Judge Smith studied law at Rutgers University he recalled how he could get downtown to class in just fifteen minutes on the well-patronized buses, and Sally remembers taking the downtown bus

[3] Michael Johns, *Moment of Grace: The American City in the 1950s*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 3.

alone, even as a child. Upon arriving downtown, residents could shop at one of the large department stores, get business done at the county courthouse, or pay their bills at one of the many banks. Downtown Camden was the showcase of the city, where poor blacks from Centerville and affluent Jews from Parkside brushed shoulders as they went about their daily routines.

While Downtown Camden may have hummed with activity during the day, its sidewalks took on a new sense of glamour at night. On Friday nights, the stores stayed open until 9:00 PM and according to Judge Smith, "in warm weather, you'd have to step off the curb and walk in the street. It was that crowded." While walking down Broadway may have been an experience in itself, the movie theaters were truly the most memorable part of a night on the town. When interviewed, most of the city's residents were able to list off almost every movie theater in the city. These included smaller neighborhood theatres like the Arlo and the Rio, as well as the downtown movie palaces, the Towers, the Savar, and the Stanley. Going out to see a picture in a downtown theater was a "suit and tie affair," stated Alvin, a projectionist.

> "The Savar and the Stanley were technically movie houses. Each had over 1,300 or 1,400 seats. They were very elaborate. You never walked into a theater in flip-flops or shorts. They didn't serve food, so you couldn't get nachos or hot dogs. When they first permitted soda, you couldn't bring it to the auditorium. You had to keep it in the lobby. I think that was until the late 1950s or the 1960s. The theaters were immaculate. You walked in and saw a closed, lit curtain. There were no commercials at all. People went to movies to see a weekly newsreel, a cartoon, maybe 2 or 3 coming attractions, and the feature film.

Even Woodrow Wilson High School held its 1958 graduation at the 1,600-seat Stanley Theater. To Camdenites, these theaters were places to see and be seen, functioning as glamorous informal gathering spaces for a city of working-class residents.

When Camden's residents weren't maintaining their homes or parading downtown, they were hard at work in one of the city's many factories. Indeed, Camden was truly a working city. While Campbell Soup Company, Radio Corporation of America, and New York Shipbuilding Corporation were the city's largest employers; numerous smaller factories manufactured everything from military uniforms to heating systems. Judge Smith explained, "at one time the most technologically advanced recording studio" was located in the Radio Corporation of America's Nipper Building. He also remembers "a train of trucks carrying tomatoes coming up Kaighn Avenue to the Campbell Soup Factory. The odors permeated the city during the summer. It was really something to see." Antonio, the shopkeeper in North Camden also remembers, "farmers from all over brought tomatoes. Their trucks lined up on 2nd Street down to Atlantic Avenue. I would take tomatoes off the truck. They would let us!" While Campbell Soup and Radio Corporation of America resided right along the waterfront in Downtown Camden, New York Ship was located further down on the Delaware River in South Camden. During World War I, the demand for workers was so great that a planned community, Fairview Village, was constructed in 1919 to house the shipyard's workers. Smith recalled how during World War II, "the shipyard was its own world. It operated twenty-four/seven." Commercial corridors along Broadway, Kaighn, Haddon, and Westfield bolstered these industries. These avenues hosted real estate agents, lawyers,

doctors, dentists, and other retail establishments.[4] Listening to these testimonies, it becomes evident that Camden was an industrial city whose working class residents took great pride in what their city made.

Therefore, we are presented with an image of Camden in the immediate post-war era as a functional, if not thriving urban center. Walking from your well-maintained row home in East Camden, you would head down your block, passing neighbors along the way, up to the corner grocer. After stopping in to say "Hello" to the shopkeeper, you keep walking until you hit busy Westfield Avenue, the commercial hub of your neighborhood. Luckily, the bus comes right away and in fifteen minutes you are downtown. It is lunchtime, so downtown is filled with workers from Campbell Soup and RCA looking to grab food at a luncheonette. Well-dressed men go about their business outside the county courthouse, and equally as nicely dressed peer into the storefronts of Lit Brothers and J.C. Penney. You are catching a matinee at the Towers Theater, so you buy your ticket and duck out of the busy street and into the luxurious lobby of the movie house.

While occurrences like these may have seemed mundane and insignificant at the time, the slowly accelerating decay of a stable urban environment showed Camdenites that they did not know what they had until it was gone.

Flight

Unsurprisingly, the draw of the suburbs had a strong appeal to Camdenites who were coming of age in the years following the Second World War, when new housing

[4] Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*, 21.

and automobiles started to become cheap and readily available. As Judge Smith explained, "homebuilders took advantage of the Federal Housing Administration. They first targeted servicemen, then appealed to city dwellers. 'Why live in a Camden row home?'" An advertisement from the January 20th 1959 edition of the Courier-Post displayed a map of South Jersey with **CAMDEN** displayed boldly in the foreground. Spreading out from the city are the various towns and numbers, which correspond to images of homes listed for sale in the adjacent advertising space. Directly under the drawings of these "well built" and "fabulous brick homes" are directions from Camden to the house.[5] Realtors were very clearly pandering to their urban audience, and the audience viewed these homes as built for them. However, the suburbs surrounding Camden were not merely bedroom communities, but centers of social and commercial activity in themselves. Alvin, the projectionist in both urban and suburban movie theaters recalled that

> The Cherry Hill Mall had restaurants, department stores, and parking for thousands of cars. The Cherry Hill Cinema would get pictures the same time as downtown Philadelphia. It had 1,500 seats. From 11:00 in the morning on, there was business all day long. Many nights it was sold out. Why would someone pay to park or take a bus to downtown Camden when they had free parking?

When it opened in 1962, the Cherry Hill Mall effectively replicated the appeal of downtown Camden in a more modern setting. To Camdenites, it was essentially illogical to live in a row home and take the bus downtown when one could just as easily have their own split-level and drive to an indoor mall. Rather than flight, the outward exodus from Camden to the suburbs was at first a gradual process of working class residents using

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[5] "Guide Map to South Jersey's Favorite." *Courier-Post*, January 20, 1959.

their increasing wealth to take advantage of a favorable real estate market and a prosperous national economy.

As families throughout the city packed up their belongings and left their homes, the residents remaining began to notice the "color" of their blocks begin to turn a shade darker. As white ethnics gradually trickled out of Camden for the spacious suburbs, African Americans and Puerto Ricans likewise sought out greater space and better housing. The well-maintained homes in Camden represented a great opportunity to minorities who had been crammed into segregated neighborhoods up to this point. As Sally, a 1958 graduate of Woodrow Wilson High School explained, "the schools were almost segregated. We had 17 black students because they were all in Camden High. It wasn't segregation. It was just neighborhood schools. I'm not proud of it, but you accepted it. You were a child." Understandably, the increasing presence of African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the neighborhoods did not go unobserved. Most residents can provide a narrative explaining which neighborhoods changed first and why. "South Camden went black when the Jewish people sold to them," Art, another Woodrow Wilson graduate, stated bluntly. According to Jack, a Cramer Hill resident, "the Kennedy and Johnson governments made it easy to get welfare in cities. It was the blacks from the South and the Spanish from Puerto Rico. They first came to North and South Camden, then Parkside. East Camden went next. Cramer Hill was the last, in the late 1970s." Residents noticed, "The people that moved in were not like the people that lived there, and "they saw what was happening to other neighborhoods and moved to the

suburbs," stated Bill, another resident of Cramer Hill. What they saw was the deterioration of neighborhoods that seemed to accompany the arrival of minority groups.[6]

The Puerto Ricans and African Americans moving into the working class neighborhoods of Camden were not presented with the same opportunities that their white predecessors had. Starting after the end of World War II, industries began to leave for the suburbs or entirely shut down. Just as residents of Camden saw new opportunities in suburban developments, industries "finally realized that there was open space. Instead of four-story plants in Camden, they could spread out on one story, with parking. One by one they moved out." However, the restructuring of the national and global economy ultimately led to industry leaving the region entirely, seeking cheap labor in the South and eventually overseas, or becoming superfluous with new technological developments.[7] "New York Ship basically went bankrupt, Campbell had a major write-off, and RCA had a big lay off," stated Jack, a Cramer Hill resident, succinctly. Judge Smith gave a more thorough explanation of the loss of the New York Ship Building Corporation.

> "Everyone worked at New York Ship. After the war, it was purchased by Merritt, Chapman, & Scott of New York. They told the workers, "The war is over. We are in a competitive environment for shipbuilding. In order to cut costs, we need concessions from you." The workers didn't believe it, so the yard closed. Along with it went the headquarters for boilermakers on Morgan Boulevard."

While New York Ship shuttered its operations entirely, the Radio Corporation of American and Campbell Soup Company merely downsized their operations in Camden

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[6] Amanda L. Seligman, Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 184.
[7] Chris Hedges, and Joe Sacco, Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt, (New York: Nation Books, 2012), 75.

and moved to new tracts of land in the adjacent suburbs with the white working class on their heels. Between 1948 and 1972, the number of manufacturing jobs in Camden dropped from 38,900 to 15,700, yet the African American population had increased by over 12,000.[8] With former working class Camdenites now securely in the middle class, the minorities that replaced them were able to fill their old homes, but not their old jobs.

In the beginning, the changes happening in the city only barely registered in the minds of Camdenites. "The first thing I noticed about the decline was that all the downtown stores got bars on their doors when they closed at night," Sally, a Woodrow Wilson graduate, "and soon they closed and were boarded up." In 1968, twelve-year-old Bill of Cramer Hill took the bus by himself to head downtown to buy a pair of slacks. After getting off the bus, he recounted,

> "I was mugged by a group of black children. They jumped me, kicked me, and said 'Give me money.' I gave them $10 and that was that. I turned right around and got back on a bus. I never went downtown without an adult escort again."

The Courier-Post published a foreshadowing series of articles in December 1968 entitled "A City In Change." Excerpts from these articles paint a telling picture of how Camdenites perceived their city just months before their rapid abandonment of it:

> "Things will get better-that's the only way left for things to get...Many longtime Camden residents prefer recalling the city as it once was rather than discuss what now exists... For many people Camden was an ideal place to live and raise a family. Today, these people wouldn't even think it's a nice place to visit...Sometime in the late 1950s people looked around and realized that they were in a decaying city...Things were going along well enough and it took a while before the realization that Camden was suffering at the

[8] Gillette, *Camden After the* Fall, 42.

> hands of the suburbs began to sink in...While the government did not have a deliberate policy against insuring homes in the city, standards evolved under the FHA until it did not have a mortgage on a single home in Camden two years ago...The housing situation is bleak and has been for several years...Right now there's absolutely no reason for a middle class family to move into Camden...The middle class is not in a hurry to move next door to people it believes to be socially and economically inferior...The enrollment at Camden High School is about 75 per cent Negro, while the percentages are reversed at Woodrow Wilson High School...No one has ever questioned the legitimacy of a 'Going Out of Business Sale" in Camden...That there are any stores still in business is remarkable...Even some businesses have been holding on for dear life in Camden, with hope born of desperation that somehow something will happen...What happens to the city depends on how successful the projects slated to replace the dust and weeds are...Most people live in Camden not out of choice but necessity...One of the city's major problems is that its citizens have little pride in where they live.[9]

Although one would assume it after reading the article, over 60% of the city's population was still white in 1968.

That remaining 60%, however, finally took notice of the decay occurring around them. Art, the movie theater projectionist, found that by the time he got married and bought a home in Marlton in 1968, "there was nothing to do in Camden unless you were a student. There were no movie theaters or restaurants." On the other hand, Jack, a Cramer Hill resident who left the city in 1980, remarked, "when people left in the late 60s, it still wasn't bad. By 1968, it was dangerous. It was in economic decline. The city was in decay. But the 1980s...that's when it got really bad." Sally, the East Camden

[9] James Smith, and Jo Murray. "Camden: A City In Change." *Courier-Post*, December 1968.

woman that took notice of the iron grates downtown had moved half of a mile away to Pennsauken with her husband Art by 1958, but they ultimately bought a home farther out in Cherry Hill in 1961. Regarding her neighbors still in Camden after she had gone, Sally assumed that that if "all these things that make your life bearable and what you want in life are gone, then you look for another place to live." She claimed her reason for moving was for the good schools, but her husband interrupted, telling her "you saw the changes coming though, hon. Come on."

The changes came in the form of riots. In 1969, unproven rumors of police brutality against a black woman sparked a gathering of African Americans that led to two deaths and widespread looting downtown for two days.[10] Jack, the 1972 graduate of Woodrow Wilson High School remembers how residents of Cramer Hill sat on the railroad bridge with guns, guarding his neighborhood from the looters. However, once tensions had cooled, he saw his untouched neighborhood go into a downward spiral before his very eyes.

> "I was walking home from a night out. I saw the guy who lived down the street from us. He was a heavy weight wrestler. He was 6 foot, two inches and weighed 275 pounds. He was sitting next to the car with a butcher knife in him, dead. The cops came and found the guy that stabbed him. He was standing on the corner with a knife in his eyes, smoking a cigarette. They were both white guys. I think it was drugs."

Even Parkside, located fairly far from the city center, felt the aftereffects of the riots. Rabbi Rosen of the Sons of Israel congregation described the tense feelings in the neighborhood after the riots:

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[10] Renee Winkler. "Rioting Deepened Camden's Divisions." *Courier-Post*, February 1, 2007.

"We weren't affected by the riots, but afterwards, the windows of the synagogue were consistently cracked by bullet holes from BB guns. The riots killed Parkside. It wasn't a bad neighborhood. Although people had moved to Pennsauken and Cherry Hill, there was no sense of urgency. We weren't even thinking about building in Cherry Hill, but immediately after the riots we started constructing a new synagogue. Before the riots, those who wanted to leave had left, those who wanted to stay remained, grasping by a straw. It didn't make sense once the riots came. It was potentially dangerous. No one wanted to see when the riots came, and it happened on such a terrible level.

Thus, the gradual exodus and steady decay began to accelerate.

However, racial tensions remained relatively stable until the summer of 1971, when the beating of a Puerto Rican man incensed the city's Hispanic community into burning and looting in North Camden. Antonio, the shopkeeper in North Camden described his perception of the event in great detail:

The riots are what ruined Camden. They were rioting across the United States in every major city. In Philadelphia, Mayor Rizzo said, 'you're not going to destroy my city." So, he put buses in front of the police station. He saved Philly. They couldn't do anything, so they came to Camden and joined forces. The cops beat up a Spanish guy in South Camden. It was just an excuse. I never heard nothing. The riots were on a Friday night. I knew something was going to happen. I felt it all day. I was single. I was going out to dinner when I heard what was happening. I lived in Cherry Hill then, so I went home and got a shotgun, beach chair, and a six-inch TV. I went back into Camden well after 7:00. I could see people walking up 2nd Street, laughing and screaming. They saw my shotgun and didn't walk on my pavement. I kept calling everyone I knew: 'Come down and protect your business!' No one came down. Only me. My sister called me saying, 'you got to come home from that store. The cops aren't coming in. People are

throwing rocks and shooting.' I didn't come home for eleven days. I cooked my dinner at about 6:30 each night. I didn't even take a shower.

This August night in 1971 was the culmination of decades of gradual social, physical, and economic decay. Camden was no longer in decline. It had fallen.

The period immediately following the riots was the point of no return for most Camdenites. Although violence, drugs, and lawlessness had not yet crippled the city, it was now clear that Camden was not coming back. Antonio, the shopkeeper, proceeded to explain,

> "When welfare day came, the grocery store had to have a cop in there. Everyone was laughing and screaming, but on the 8th of the month everyone was broke. 'Hey can you give me a pack of cigarettes?' They weren't worth it. Maybe the parents were nice, but the kids all turned out to be roaching. My store got robbed one night in the middle of the month. I only had $40. I asked them, 'Are you crazy?' They took my lottery tickets and that was it. Even the crooks are dumb. I should've sold my store in '72 and gotten the hell out."

The outer neighborhoods were not spared either. Jack, the Cramer Hill resident who graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School one year after the riot, remarked on the dramatic difference between his class and the following year's. "It was an amazing difference in the school. There was a big exodus of white people that year. It went from being 50/50 to 25/75." This shift is even more dramatic considering the aforementioned Courier-Post article's assertion that Woodrow Wilson was still 75% white in 1968. By the time he graduated, "it was bad there. We used to fight every day. That's the way you lived. Everyone was pretty much scared of me. I was the strongest guy in South Jersey

at the time. You couldn't intimidate me. But you started to see guns come around in the '80s, and I was married and out of there."

The departure of the self-proclaimed "South Jersey's strongest" signifies the end of the period in focus. With the start of the crack epidemic and the emergence of drug gangs and warfare, the streets of Camden saw unprecedented levels of crime. This period represented a new era in Camden's history, one that arguably continues to the present. Former residents' perceptions of Camden and their feelings associated with it seem to directly relate to the date that they left the city. Sally and Art, the East Camden couple that left in 1958, "had a smooth transition. We left in the beginning of the decline. We had no sense of loss." However, a friend of this couple, Jane, remained until 1967, which was perhaps late enough to cultivate a sense of fear within her, confessed,

> "I don't enjoy telling people I was from Camden. I do tell them it was different then. I don't return to Camden. One occasion, I guess it was 7 years ago; we were going to take our friends' children to the aquarium. My husband plotted it on the GPS. They way it took was down Westfield Avenue. I said, 'no. We have to get off this street. We have someone's children. I'm afraid for myself.' I didn't like that. 'We should be on a highway where there's more people.' You can move faster if you feel threatened and there are more options to get out. I don't go back anymore. I don't want to see the neighborhood. My parents bought a lovely little bungalow when I was four, I don't want to see that now. I'd be afraid."

Antonio, the shopkeeper moved out in 1969 but maintained his store until 1988. When asked, he angrily spurted out: "Why would I want to go back? The people that destroyed Camden still live there. They want you to come donate, fuck them people. They destroyed Camden and they still live there!"

Part 2

The story of the decline and collapse of Camden, as told by the people fleeing from it, is a compelling and heartfelt narrative of people's lives in a community that was disappearing before their very eyes. When interviewed, former Camdenites visibly displayed pride for their city, reacted with anger towards what happened, fondly remembered their past, and wistfully thought of what could have been. Therefore, one must be wary of subjectivity in their narratives of this period. However with a prior understanding of the process of white flight, specifically within Camden, the stories of ex-Camdenites provide a valuable personal context to the story. Interviewing former residents also allows us to discover some underlying trends in the ways in which they interpreted the events happening around them. From these personal stories, we are able to assert that progress, race, family, fear, and nostalgia were five of the concepts most prominent in working class whites' perception of white flight in Camden.

Progress

Even at its peak in the years immediately following World War II, Camden was perceived as outdated. Rabbi Rosen in Parkside explained rather bluntly, "this was not a place to grow. People did not want to live in an older, worn out city. There was no beauty there. It was an old and has been community." A similar mindset pervaded in government. A newspaper article from January 27th 1959 quoted Representative William T. Cahill as saying "the fact of the matter is that Camden City is deteriorating and has

been doing so steadily for the past 20 years under its present administration."[11] Chris, a Cramer Hill resident, remembers his middle school friend telling him, "there's no way in hell I'm bringing up kids here." Coming from the mouth of a preteen, this remark is even more poignant when recognized that it was uttered in the early 1960s, when most still viewed the city as relatively nice. Therefore, the idea of Camden as archaic, deteriorating, and out-of-fashion was powerful even when the city still hummed with activity.

When asked why they had not chosen to buy a home in Camden once upon reaching adulthood, many of those interviewed were surprised at the question. It did not make sense to purchase a home in a crowded city of old housing stock with developing racial tensions when new suburban homes with plentiful parking could be obtained relatively cheaply. In the suburbs, "informal house visiting, the absence of older folks, the dominance of children, and a rather frenetic community life all helped to create a casual culture."[12] According to Sally of East Camden, "it was the young, more affluent people that moved first because they wanted something more for their children." The idea that parents could give their children something better than Camden emerged from their own aspiration to achieve middle class prosperity and do better than their parents. Understandably, Camden represented an older generation to residents coming of age in the post-war era. Even if the city's homes were well maintained and its stores were packed with merchandise, Camden symbolized an old, working class way of life that was on its way out. Therefore, the first people to pack up and leave were not necessarily fleeing Cramer Hill, but flocking to Cherry Hill.

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[11] "Rep. Cahill Hits U.S. Agency On City Planning Praise: Raps 'Ivory Tower' View" 1959)
[12] Johns, *Moment of Grace*, 112.

Race

While Camdenites barely perceived the physical decline of the city around them, they were highly aware of the changing racial make up of many of the city's neighborhoods. Camden had segregated communities of African Americans and Puerto Ricans for decades, and the movement out of these increasingly crowded quarters began slowly. Usually, the most affluent blacks moved first to a white neighborhood where they coexisted peacefully with their neighbors. Rabbi Rosen described the racial make-up of his neighborhood of Parkside in the early 1960s and felt that

> "The caliber of blacks who had moved in was of a better class. They were busy running their own lives. They weren't looking to make problems with other people. I had black people next to me. It was a strip of four homes with one black family and another that moved in later. They were well mannered. There were no problems. People didn't look down on them. People treated them like anyone else. It was a good, harmonious relationship.

Ex-Camdenites used their positive interactions with a select group of minority individuals to demonstrate their racial tolerance. Accepting certain blacks, whites could then make generalizations about the minority groups encroaching on their neighborhoods without being given the misnomer of a racist. Rosen contrasted his prosperous black neighbors with the blacks that became increasingly prevalent after the riots, stating:

> Either they changed their attitudes or people from other parts of Camden came in. They shot BB gun bullets into the windows of the synagogue. That said to me, "We don't respect the property of white people anymore." People come from downtown, doing what they needed to do to get even with the 'whities.'

By comparing "good" blacks to "bad" blacks, the rabbi was just acting as an impartial judge of character. From this position, whites could view themselves as victims of the "bad" blacks without being held culpable for perpetuating racist practices.

While this was the typical interpretation of racial relations in the neighborhoods of Camden, there were many variations from the norm. Perhaps because they were being interviewed, many of the respondents tactfully avoided making explicitly racial comments. For instance, Jane, a new resident of Cherry Hill, recalled that when she returned to visit her parents in the old East Camden neighborhood she felt uncomfortable because she "started to see the kind of families that would have lots of cars or cars up on blocks. Instead of seeming like they had something to do, these families were just sitting on porches or milling around. We weren't used to it. People were occupied." Interviewees could also qualify their generalizations with a statement reaffirming their lack of bigotry. Here, Chris, a Cramer Hill resident started out his portrayal of the neighborhood by stating, "I don't want to get prejudiced." For Antonio, the North Camden shopkeeper, the word "They" became a term for the enigmatic force destroying his city.

> "*They* were rioting across the US...*They* couldn't do anything. *They* came to Camden...After *they* destroyed Center City Camden, I felt *they* were going to do something to my store...When *they* destroyed North Camden on that Friday night, I kept calling everyone I knew...*They* rioted cause *they* weren't from the neighborhood...*They* destroyed Camden...Every day after the riots, people would say '*they're* going to get your store today'...*They* totally destroyed the city... *They* destroyed everything...It was so vicious the night *they* rioted...*They* didn't even leave a hanger...*They* spell cat with a 'K'...*They* were all nice people. *They* even screwed over the people that lived

there...*They* want you to come donate...*They* destroyed Camden and *they* still live there...*They* weren't worth it...*They* destroyed everything they touched...*They* made my store an apartment house."

After being asked, he finally admitted, "they" were "the people that moved in." Even if the subject being discussed was fairly obvious, using the pronoun "they" allowed the shopkeeper to hold a group accountable for all of the city's general woes without explicitly targeting a specific group. These tactics all helped to mitigate the appearance of racism even as they were forced to interpret events with significant racial implications.

On the other side of the spectrum were ethnic whites who reacted to racial tensions with explicitly racist responses. Chris, a resident of Cramer Hill explained, "It was instilled in us. You feared them." Destroying homes before the minorities occupied them was definitely an extreme example of the explicit racism during white flight. However, most simply watched the neighborhoods "go" black and observed their neighbors. Jack, the 1972 graduate of Woodrow Wilson High School recalled the divisions between students on the wrestling team. "On Friday night we had spaghetti dinner in the gym. The blacks and Hispanics would get high or drunk. These fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen-year-olds would come bring their kids to spaghetti dinner. That was a rude awakening." After graduating from high school, he worked for his dad's exterminating business into the late 1970s.

"I would go into the houses of Spanish and blacks in North and South Camden. You noticed that the Spanish, even though they were poor, tried to keep their homes clean. You could smell the bleach and Clorox. Blacks were horrible. They didn't clean. It was disgusting going into a house. A black woman's house in South Camden, in Morgan Village (a terrible, terrible place), had rats. Lady was throwing trash in the cellar. I told

her, 'you're never going to get rid of the rats if you keep throwing trash in the cellar' and I walked out. My father kept the business until he died in 2006. He was like Rambo in the jungle.

This association between black people and the visible signs of moral and physical decay falls just short of holding African Americans accountable for Camden's demise. The Rabbi Rosen explained why blacks eventually acted out.

> "Those people didn't make it economically. There were no decent jobs. They were unhappy. There were drugs and liquor. They had a meaningless life. They gave up. They let out what they were feeling in violence. Those living in Parkside were reasonably happy, but the others...they were uneducated, drunk, or on drugs. The situation makes you unhappy. If you're a have not, you are angry with those who have. People are ready to kill someone to get something to eat."

Here, the rabbi justifies the actions of poor blacks by attributing their actions to things like "a meaningless life" and "the malaise of society." Thus, while appearing empathetic, he ultimately oversimplifies an issue without addressing any responsibility placed on whites while simultaneously dismissing African Americans' as capable of ensuring their own success. Ultimately, while none of those interviewed ever explicitly blamed the incoming minorities for the death of Old Camden, the associations they made between the negative characteristics of blacks with the decline of the city allows one to easily infer what they perceived of the role that African Americans and Hispanics played.

However, one cannot dismiss the testimonies of multiple Camdenites as just racist diatribes. Regardless of their prior disposition towards minorities, it must be understood that these people had real experiences that influenced the way they viewed race. Be it Chris the twelve-year-old who got mugged downtown by black children, Jack the

exterminator who visited the clean homes of the Hispanics, or Antonio the shopkeeper who saw minorities threaten to destroy his store; their stories cannot be discredited. The dramatic deterioration of Camdenites' communities had a complex set of causes, but the increased presence of racial minorities on their blocks was the most tangible indicator of change. In an attempt to understand the dramatic changes taking place around them, whites made sweeping generalizations and placed the blame on blacks and Hispanics without attempting to understand their own role in the city's destruction. This was most poignantly demonstrated when Cramer Hill residents destroyed the homes of blacks rather than risk the *potential* destruction of their own. This argument is no way an apology for racist actions and thoughts, but simply an attempt to understand why race was such an important factor in ex-Camdenites' understanding of the postwar era.

Family

As the setting of the childhoods of almost all of the interviewees, memories of Camden have strong associations with memories of family. As Chris, a Cramer Hill resident put it, "I do miss home, but it's not where I grew up. It's family. I don't miss the city or the suburbs, but I miss being near my family." For others who missed Camden for reasons beyond the family, family life still remained a key component in their recollections of Camden. Jane, a resident of East Camden recalls how her social life revolved partly around her family. She had grandparents, aunts and uncles, and great aunts and uncles in East Camden and South Camden. Chris, the second youngest of nine siblings recalls how even as they grew older, he and his siblings all lived within a block of their mother until she left Camden for Runnemede. The dominant presence of family

in the neighborhood, even if it was not one's own, was an important tool for maintaining order, especially among the children. Bill, another resident of Cramer Hill, remembers

> "My mother had flowers all over the place, in the house and outside of the house. My father would grow vegetables in our backyard. One day, my mother noticed there was a tulip missing from one of the stems. Next day, she finds another. For three days they are pulled off their stems. On the fourth or fifth day, a woman comes to the door and apologizes, saying, "my daughter has been picking them for me." My mother thought it was cute. That was the kind of people we grew up with."

Casual interactions like this gave Camdenites subtle reassurance that their neighbors were attentive to their own families as well as those of others. These communities essentially acted as extended networks of families. Therefore, a block with strong, responsible families meant a healthy neighborhood.

Understanding this, it should not come as a surprise that white ethnics were disturbed by the unfamiliarity of the workings of minority families. They saw the common patterns of these families as indicative of their volatile and abnormal nature, and "often attributed the pathologies of the ghetto to the nature of the family."[13] Rabbi Rosen explained how "the malaise of society led to a pressure to turn children out," but without a decent job, you cannot raise children and grandchildren. Thus, "the father was drunk. The mother was on drugs." According to him, this family environment helped produce the angry blacks that destabilized Camden. Art, an East Camden resident, felt that "it became not safe to raise families or raise children there. And when that happens, that's the deterioration of an area." For him, broken families were indicative of decline, but not

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[13] Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against Liberalism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 65.

the cause of it. The increasingly harsh environment of Camden hindered the development of strong family dynamics, which led to the collapse of social order in the city. If families were casualties of the fall of Camden, they were also the necessary ingredients for the city's restoration, according to Art. Regardless, whether it was through mom's spaghetti sauce or mom's crack addiction, working class Camdenites used family life as an easy framework for understanding the societal changes occurring in the city.

Fear

The bullet holes in the synagogue window said it all to the Rabbi Rosen of the Sons of Israel congregation in Parkside. After the riots of 1969, it was the little things that began to happen which scared the residents of his neighborhood:

> "Your sense of security and internal feelings changed. After the riots, people became fearful. The neighboring congregation placed police outside of the Hebrew school during weekday afternoons. They were motivated by internal fears for the safety of the children. They never had police before the riots. Was it dangerous? No. Threatening? Not really, but the riots made you feel uncomfortable. Was it the people in the neighborhood? Probably not. People who lived in safe neighborhoods didn't feel safety. 'There is nothing left in Camden. Do not know what's going to happen tomorrow. It can only get worse.' These uneasy feelings made me recognize the need to move."

The paranoia that gripped whites in Camden's neighborhoods expedited the gradual exodus out of the city. "It was the fear of change. That's basically why it happened," stated Bill, a Cramer Hill resident.

"They moved away and let it go. They left it behind. It was like dropping a piece of paper on the ground and walking away. They saw what was happening in other neighborhoods and moved to the suburbs. And everything started going downhill. A lot of it was fear because they couldn't understand. These people just threw their hands in the air and walked away, instead of fighting for what you believed in."

This apprehension cannot be entirely attributed to the riots. Fear slowly grew with the gradual decline of the city. The early-on appearance of iron bars on storefronts downtown implied to shoppers that they needed to be protected from *something*. The previously referenced series in the December 1968 Courier-Post states, "there is also the fear for personal safety that has risen along with the crime rate. A retail store owner says that the percentage of his customers who order by telephone and want purchases delivered has risen rapidly."[14] Even before the outburst of violence in September of 1969, the city had been deemed unsafe. Therefore, one must question whether or not perceptions of certain parts of the city as dangerous were self-fulfilling, in that they only worsened the condition of neighborhoods by discouraging people from visiting and living there.

Fear did not only involve risking life and limb. As in most American cities, realtors engaged in blockbusting throughout Camden's neighborhoods. Realtors encouraged white working class residents to sell their homes before the block turned black and values decreased. Residents feared that their home was losing value and would sell to black buyers, spreading blacks further and encouraging more white homeowners to leave for the suburbs. Even as Camdenites were scared out of their homes, houses in

[14] James Smith, and Jo Murray. "Camden: A City In Change." *Courier-Post*, December 1968.

Whitman Park sold at good prices, albeit to minority families, throughout the 1960s."[15] As Camdenites began to realize the implications of a black presence in their neighborhood, some took matters into their own hands to prevent the destruction of their homes and communities. In Cramer Hill circa 1967,

> "White people (ass holes that lived nearby) would firebomb a house. They set the houses on fire, but made sure that people weren't there. This is because, for the most part, when someone sold a house you could not discriminate. If a black person gave you full asking price, you could not refuse the sale. The owner would say, "Black people bought the house, what can I say?" If those people didn't move in right away, that house was torched."

By acting on their fears, residents of Camden facilitated the processes of change and decay that they feared most.

Growing up, the Judge Smith felt "there was no more crime in Camden than in any place else, except for maybe the suburbs." But, even for those who left Camden before they could conceive of feeling unsafe in the city, there was point in which many Camdenites realized that this was a place they did not even feel comfortable visiting. Sally and Art would frequently visit Art's mother who still lived in the Westfield Acres public housing complex. Even after his car was stolen (but later found intact) in 1961, the couple would still take his mother out shopping weekly. However, by the time she retired in 1972, "we felt uncomfortable there. You locked your doors. We tried hard to get her out. She was by herself then." Adults throughout the suburbs viewed their parents in the old neighborhood with increasing apprehension. Most of the older generation held out until age or their children's nagging got the best of them. One can imagine that as

[15] Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*, 56.

they looked out over the well-manicured lawn of their row home for the last time, these elderly working class Camdenites felt a sense of satisfaction for their perseverance against the forces that scared away their neighbors decades ago.

Nostalgia

Even as he argued: "The city is dead. Put a cork in it. I don't give a fuck if you're talking to the President. To go up Broadway, you've got to be nuts. Insane." Antonio, the shopkeeper in North Camden paused and breathed heavily when asked how he feels when he thinks of Camden. "I think of Camden every day…Jesus Christ," he answered. Regardless of one's feelings about the city of today, memories of Camden remain powerful. For most of the interviewees, Camden was where they developed into the person they are today. Even if they feel no attachment to the places, streets, and houses of the city, the people they interacted with surely must have left a mark. When interviewing ex-Camdenites, one must sift through these personal stories about important people and events to understand the setting in which they occurred. However, what one can glean from these memories tells a powerful story that objective data alone cannot convey. As Alison Isenberg points out, "while some reminisced about a cherry Coke with grandmother, others also brought up sit-ins and segregated lunch counters" when recalling memories of downtown America.[16] However great the potential for uncovering the past is, the danger lies when the lens of nostalgia begins to obfuscate the truth and influence memory.

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[16] Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 306.

Residents now recall with fondness the city's department stores and movie theaters, but they were more than willing to abandon these downtown institutions when the Cherry Hill Mall opened in 1961.[17] Admittedly, one cannot blame them for flocking to the modern, climate-controlled environment with all the features of downtown, plus ample parking. Yet, this dichotomy of memory and reality highlights how residents who lament the loss of the amenities of Old Camden often ignore their own perceptions of the city at the time. As stated previously, the gradual decline went unseen by most Camdenites until the city around them began to decay rapidly. Then, the city that they dismissed as emblematic of a worn out past suddenly became something to be missed. Others, including a resident of Cramer Hill, were okay with leaving because, "this timeframe of ours is over with. Let's get out of here and move on with our life." As one moved on and matured, Camden became irrelevant to one's life once there was no family remaining there. Therefore, Jane, the East Camden woman who refused to drive down Westfield Avenue decades after she left the city, relegated Camden to the realm of nostalgia.

> "It is nostalgia. I like to think back. I think of how nice it was. It was where I grew up. I think of the fun we had. I think of the high school. I went to Woodrow Wilson. Across from the high school, there was a large park with a library and events. I'm sorry about what happened, but I prefer to be nostalgic cause I had so many nice times and family there. My parents took care of the things they purchased with their money. We saw how hard my dad worked for those things. To see people come in and not take care of those things is a little disheartening. I prefer to think of happy things.

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[17] Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*, 48.

For many of Camden's former residents, the city of their youth is entirely divorced from the city of today. Rather than face the painful reality of the collapse of the community that raised you, one can focus on the city when it was good, further clouding the negative out of the collective memory of Old Camden.

Former residents' relationships to Camden vary greatly. There is Bill, the man who frequently drives around his old neighborhood and claims "I would move back, if I could, to my father's house in Cramer Hill." More common, however, are the residents who have little interaction with the city other than for jury duty at the county courthouse or a family trip to the aquarium. When interviewees were asked how they felt when they talked about Camden, the responses had a tinged mix of emotions. There is a fondness for the city that was, a sense of mourning for the loss of it, and bit of anger towards what it has become. Alvin, the Rutgers student that worked as a projectionist in the movie houses, mainly missed "the grand old theaters. I grew up in the business and miss all of it because you don't get the same thing going to a multiplex." Meanwhile, Judge Smith explained that he mainly felt sadness about his fallen city:

> "I remember what it was. I remember enjoying where I lived. There's a very unique quality about people who grew up in the city. They speak of the city with affection, with nostalgia. It was a time people like to remember."

According to Bill, the aforementioned resident of Cramer Hill,

> "When I think of Camden, I have mixed feelings. There is nostalgia and sadness. But it's my city of birth. It's something nostalgic. There is sadness for a lot of what happened to it, but then again there's happiness from the good things that are happening in Camden. They are building up the waterfront. I think that's great. But it's mostly nostalgia cause that's the city of my birth. I never really...I won't...I won't turn my back

on Camden. If someone came up to me and said, 'Would you do for this for Camden?' I would do it.

A City Invincible

"In a dream, I saw a city invincible." These words, from the pen of the famous poet and Camdenite, Walt Whitman, grace the façade of city hall. From here one could watch Federal Street over the decades as the crowds thinned and the stores and offices boarded up. Although the white working class may have escaped Camden before its utter collapse and the onset of lawlessness, they have the unique perspective of having seen the city transition before their very eyes. They saw what it was when it was still thriving, so they know what it still has the potential to be. New York Ship Building will never launch a destroyer from its dry docks, nor are the Polish likely to ever parade through Whitman Park on Pulaski Day. Yet, the ability to create a functional, stable community is still there. However, some Camdenites may disagree. Jack, self-proclaimed "South Jersey's strongest," doesn't see the end of these events:

> "You can't break the chain. Kids are brought up with one parent. They don't know their father. There are six-year-olds getting paid by drug dealers to look out for cops. It's ingrained. No morals. No values. What's scary is there is no remorse for killing someone. It's just like the flick of a switch. It doesn't bother them an iota. My brother told me, 'These guys from Camden are so ruthless that they take over the prison.'"

For this Cramer Hill resident, social deviants with no hope for recovery continue to rule Camden in a reign of lawlessness and terror. The North Camden shopkeeper asserted,

> "They built a baseball park, the aquarium, the Tweeter Center. They're on the river. They brag, but what the hell comes out of it. It's like a guy in a tuxedo with brown

shoes. People don't even want to come for jury duty. Camden will never come back. I don't give a damn who you talk to. The people who talk about it now never lived there. I lived there."

Thankfully, some of the other people that "lived there" disagree. Alvin, the projectionist returns to the city for a Rutgers University reunion every year and sees progress:

"The state aquarium is there. The battleship is there. A couple of new restaurants are open. There is a big performing arts center. So we still go into Camden, but we go in for specific reasons. I think if you go in as often as I do, you see it starting to revitalize. You see the hospital expanding. The medical school is there. The RCA building has become loft apartments. They knocked down the prison on the north side. Undoubtedly, there will be a pricey construction over there. It's going to come back, but not overnight. Every day things are changing. North Camden after dark is still considered one of the main drug and murder capitals in the area. Drive down State Street and you see attorney's mansions. If you take Pyne Point and use your imagination, it can be redone. Cooper Street, on the side of the bridge where Rutgers is, was lawyers row. Doctors and lawyers lived along there.

The projectionist saw physical improvement as signs of the city's advancement. While downtown is visibly improving, he is unique in seeing potential in North Camden. This neighborhood has a notorious reputation. However, Bill, a Cramer Hill resident, directly addresses the notoriety of Camden.

"Okay it's a city. A city is going to have crime. Knock it off. This is stupid. I can go into center city Camden and not worry about it. I can go to Anthony Park Homes and St. Anthony's School. I've been there. I went to church there a couple of times. You can't take what you hear in the news and all of the sudden be a judge. I'm not saying go there

at nighttime. Your chances for getting mugged or killed are higher at a certain time of day... There are two colleges there! People still work in the city of Camden. People still work in the city. They have no reason to bother you. 'There were three people killed on 3rd & Pine." Well, what happened in Philadelphia? Minneapolis? Anchorage? Sacramento? I mean there may be more crime than on the outskirts in Cherry Hill, Pennsauken, and Maple Shade."

The issue that he addresses is relevant to this analysis of Camden's history. One may ask, how can understanding the story of white flight in Camden benefit the city if the people interviewed have essentially dissociated "Old" and "New" Camden? Remembering Old Camden will not help construct new homes and offices, nor will it likely be a rallying point around which to revive the city. What it can do is highlight the city's fascinating past and demonstrate the innate potential it has to thrive. These points are necessary to demonstrate in order to dismantle the stigma that cripples Camden. How can a city flourish when people are ashamed to admit they are from there? Camden must look to its past to find its future. Until then, association with it will tarnish any successes that come out of Camden. Admittedly, improving the reputation of Camden by emphasizing its past is only a minimal step in the right direction. Nonetheless, the stories of these eccentric and resilient residents will confirm that Camden truly is a city invincible.