

Cincinnati.com

Opinion: Perception of Price Hill is not the reality

Ben Klayer, Opinion contributor Published 4:30 p.m. ET July 24, 2019

Recently, a rap music video went viral around Cincinnati's internet sphere. Filmed near blighted areas in Price Hill, it depicts a group of teenagers flashing weapons and staging a robbery. The video sparked controversy after an adolescent featured in the video was murdered.

Upon watching the two-minute-long production, I browsed social media comments, and I became frustrated by some folks' remarks. Beyond the typical "what about their parents" and other deflections, I noticed a plethora of insults aimed at my community. The most striking: Price Hill should be quarantined, just another day in Price Hill, Price Hill has depreciated, etc.

Admittedly, the video contributes to a negative perception that Cincinnati residents have acquired during the past two decades (although my opinion is nuanced by how the rappers expressed their own realities, as opposed to "glorifying" violence). Besides the Incline District, people think that Price Hill is dangerous, dirty and worthless. Consequently, elected officials ignore our needs, and the cycle continues. A mirror only reflects whatever is positioned in front of it.

I want to begin shifting that judgment. Right here, right now.

First of all, "Price Hill" is a collective term that encompasses three separate neighborhoods: West, East and Lower Price Hill. Each neighborhood is legally different and has defined boundaries. Longtime residents might remember them as Upper Price Hill, Price Hill and Eighth and State. They're essentially the same, just with evolved names and demographics. The music video was primarily filmed in East Price Hill.

Positive energy flows through all three Price Hill neighborhoods. Every single day, I see people working hard to improve our community, despite a lack of outside resources. Volunteers pick up litter, provide information about jobs, give food to homeless people, operate a greenhouse and ecovillage, organize fun events and much more. Three major nonprofits – Price Hill Will, Santa Maria Community Services and Community Matters – offer programs and services among several fields. Together, we have built a foundation that is inclusive for anybody who wants to participate.

Example: the Creative Community Festival happened in mid-July, hosted by MYCincinnati – a youth orchestra program of Price Hill Will. This 4th annual event brought artists from all around the world, who practice various disciplines, to perform at four venues in East Price Hill. The festival was mostly organized and executed by volunteers. Almost \$8,000 was raised beforehand to ensure that anybody could attend for free. Our community spirit shone full-force during that weekend.

Aside from artistic endeavors, East Price Hill – which includes the Incline District – is marching toward the future in other capacities. Starting by the end of 2019, the Price Hill library branch will undergo a complete remodel, including modernized space built around the current building. The community-engaged "Warsaw Alive" plan will revitalize the main business corridor.

But East isn't the only Price Hill neighborhood with positive energy. Within the past two years, the West Price Hill Community Council has achieved sustainable goals aimed to boost the business districts, improve pedestrian safety and connect with a diversifying population. This includes winning grants to beautify the gateway garden and provide comfortable benches for bus riders, plus collaborating with the East Price Hill Improvement Association and Price Hill Will to win a competitive \$210,000 grant for street lighting upgrades. Furthermore, the community-council-supported development projects such as the Boys and Girls Club, local restaurants and the new Elder High School fitness center. All of these brought-to-fruition ideas have spurred the neighborhood's growth.

Lower Price Hill has experienced similar progress as well. Renovation of the second set of 10 single-family homes will wrap up in early August. This partnership between Habitat for Humanity, Community Matters and the Community Learning Center Institute will double the home-ownership rate. A larger project will create more affordable housing units throughout the next five years. Additionally, Price Hill Will has selected a proprietor for a building it is renovating on State Avenue. That organization – aptly called Your Store of the Queen City – will open a fresh grocery and deli based on the community's vision. Not only will this create new jobs, it will also address the "food desert" in Lower Price Hill.

I could go on and on. As a resident of West Price Hill, I am personally excited about our community's advancement. These highlights exemplify our DIY attitude and positive outlook. We build instead of destroy. We talk to our neighbors instead of complain on social media. We understand our issues, and then seek solutions. We love.

To anybody who looks down on Price Hill: I challenge you to become involved in our community. Volunteer your time. Donate money. Walk the streets; they're much safer than you imagine. Attend a music show, stage performance, or art gallery. Try some new restaurants. Positivity flows through all three neighborhoods. Come experience it for yourself.

The rap music video is a reflection of our society. The tragic murder is a symptom of systematic problems. Let's start to fix them together. Right here, right now.

Hamilton County Prosecutor Joe Deters recently suggested that National Guard soldiers be stationed in Price Hill to deter violent crime. I believe his idea is terrible. It would sow distrust and could possibly lead to riots.

I invite Mr. Deters to spend some time in Price Hill with myself and other passionate individuals so that he might gain a better understanding of the challenges we face.

Ben Klayer is a published author and political activist who lives in West Price Hill.