

BELTLINE ORAL HISTORIES

Jacob's Ladder CDC

Department of Anthropology

PROJECT COORDINATORS

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NEIGHBORHOOD

Beltline, Memphis City Fairgrounds redevelopment district

CHALLENGE

Developed in the 1920s, the minimalist design of the Beltline community was intended to accommodate a high density, low-income population. Neighborhood design neglected common amenities such as parks, schools, and community centers. For close to a century the Beltline has struggled to find its voice, and today residents wrestle with a hard combination of blight, crime and poverty. With the impending redevelopment of the adjacent Memphis City Fairgrounds complex, the generation gap and general lack of knowledge of community history and identity makes engaging in the revitalization process a challenge.

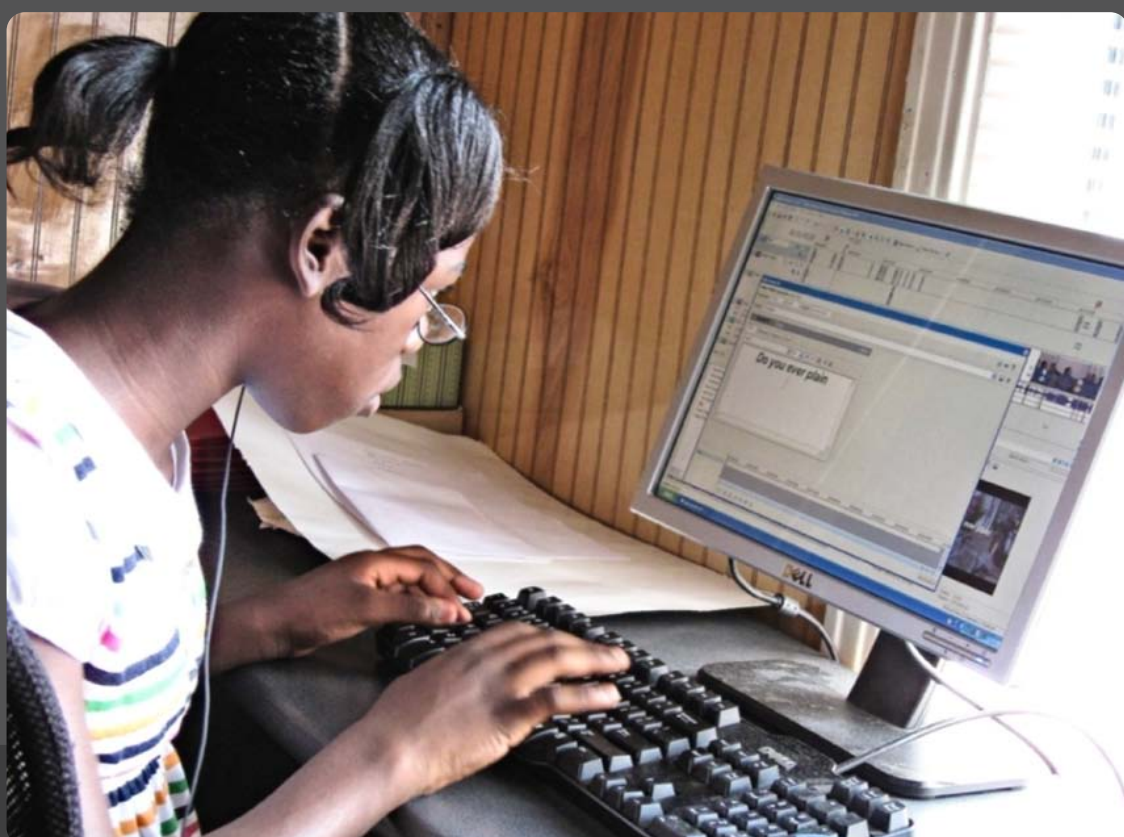
IDEA

Develop a collective oral history of the Beltline neighborhood through:

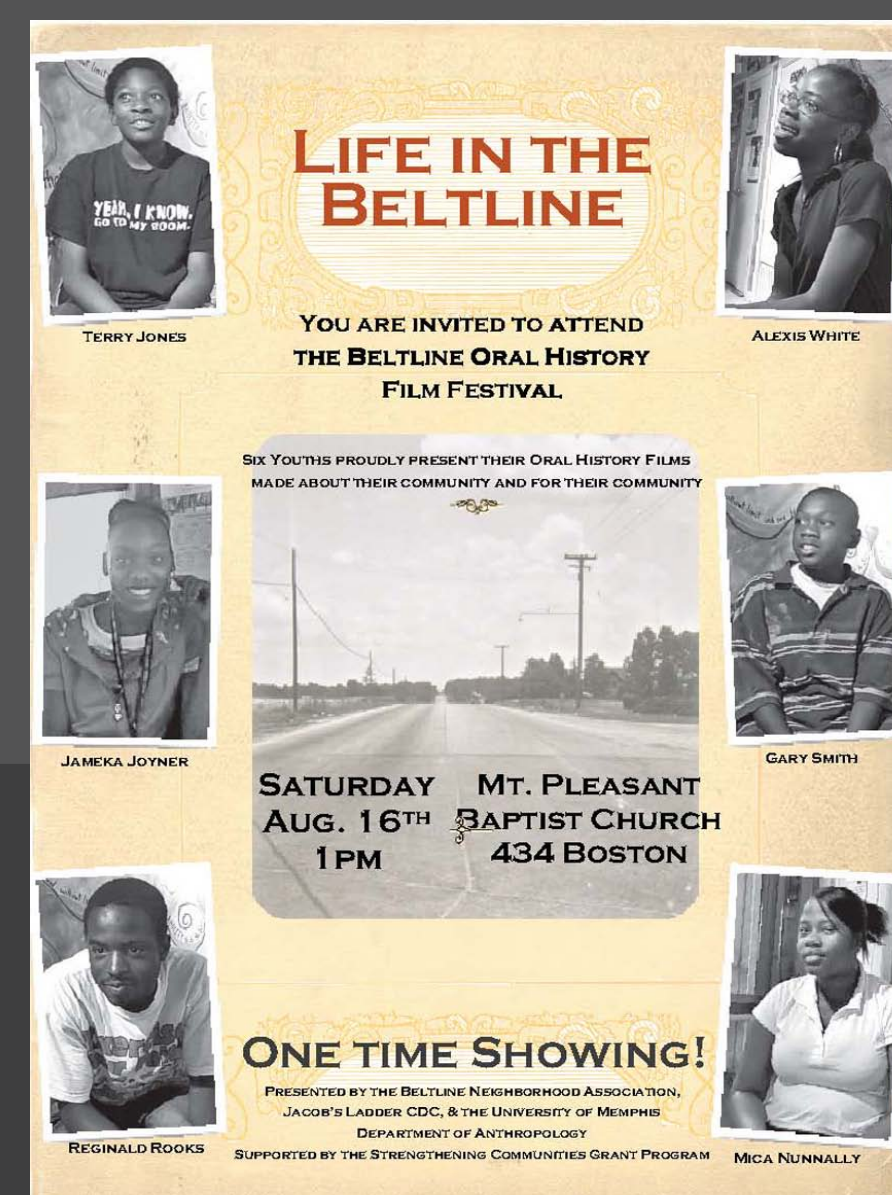
- Capturing the oral histories of the long-time residents through interviews
- Engaging youth in the neighborhood by training them to conduct interviews and produce their own videos
- Producing digital films of the collective histories presented through the interviews

IMPACT

- Six youth-produced oral history video documentaries
- A film festival hosted by the students showcasing their films
- Preservation of important community knowledge
- Tools to give the neighborhood a voice and influence the redevelopment plans surrounding the community
- More than 50 students and 2 faculty supported the process, giving students a meaningful learning experience and furthering the engaged research agenda of the faculty members



Local students learned how to conduct interviews, take video and use production software to create oral history films telling the historical importance of their neighborhoods.



Beltline youth took great pride in sharing their video histories with the community at a widely publicized Film Festival.