

## Familiar Agent: Left Winged Kansas University College Student

For my fabric of Downtown Lawrence, Kansas a familiar agent is the left winged Kansas University College Student. While I did not choose to go to KU, living in Lawrence, KS for seventeen years, immersed in the ambiance of a college town has made me very familiar with the operations of the left winged KU college student; as well as many of my hometown friends being of that category. Though not the geographic center of the city, Mass St., identifying Downtown Lawrence, is the social center. Mass street lies three blocks away from KU main campus and the three streets separating the two are filled with KU students in off campus housing. Also literally down the street at the South end of Mass lies Haskell Indian Nations University.

Lawrence, KS itself politically is commonly referred to as the dot of blue in the sea of red, having the spill of population from Kansas City as well as its own strong left winged attitude because of its historical foundations. This has recently been very relevant with the slew of Black Lives Matter protests. Especially with many vocal Black Lives Matter supporters being of the younger generation, KU students and many other Lawrencians flock to South Park at the end of Downtown Lawrence to walk down Mass St and peacefully protest. Downtown would be covered in spray paint and posters supporting BLM after these protests. While not as violent as other protests, BLM protesters were still met with many "rednecks" counter protesting, proudly waving confederate flags.

It is easy for so many people to congregate downtown because every block of Mass St is flanked by a multitude of parking lots and there is even a four story parking garage almost the length of a block. Almost everybody in the midwest owns a car. Driving starts as early as fourteen with a farmers permit. It is common for every family member to have their own car because that is how necessary a car is. Kansas public transportation is severely lacking and the existing bus system still does not work very well with how spread out everything is in the midwest. Downtown Lawrence is the longest stretch of walkable area with tightly condensed shops and restaurants, maintained sidewalks, and stuff to do. Therefore, it is also a place of congregation for people to hang out. If a group of people hang out in any other public location, they would be stuck in that one place without enough car space for everyone to meander around. It is easier to move as a large group on foot downtown without having to go through logistics of drivers and car space.

Downtown Lawrence is also dedicated by the city as a place of congregation, holding official events like parades and festivals downtown. The geography of congregating on the main axis of Mass St and rarely going down the perpendicular fingers makes the parking on the opposite sides of the blocks a perfect situation for people to easily congregate on Mass St. The architecture of the buildings also promotes this geography with many stores having both their front and back doors open as to allow that flow between Mass St. and the back parking. Along with the stores there are also some dedicated cut through walkways leading from the parking lot to Mass St.

Besides the ease of driving, the right winged KU College student utilizes the close proximity and walking layout to hit the “bar-muda triangle” at night. The infamous triangle consists of The Wagon Wheel, Bullwinkles and The Jayhawk Cafe that have been operating in their same locations for over fifty years, being filled with KU college students every weekend night. It has been accepted in town to disregard the late night noise (especially with many non KU students living on Mass St or on the other side of it) because the location of these bars greatly reduce the normally necessary need for a designated driver. With the format of the midwest and Lawrence this ease is very uncommon but the gem of Downtown Lawrence being in such close proximity to campus makes this possible.

Ranging from large organised protests, city events, to smaller social gatherings Downtown Lawrence is also the unsaid gathering place for celebration. If anything big happens, from KU being the 2008 NCAA Men’s Basketball Championship to Joe Biden winning the 2020 election, nobody has to officially plan anything for the whole town to celebrate downtown together. While people from across town drive over to celebrate, those first to arrive are the residence of Downtown Lawrence.

Ohio St, Tennessee, and Kentucky streets separate KU from Mass St. and are filled with dorms and off campus housing. On the east side of Mass St and on Mass St. itself lives the standard Lawrencian. The apartments above Mass St. are always the most sought after and are the most expensive because of its prime location of being in the social center. Recently apartment complexes have been taking advantage of this and many new apartment buildings have erected on New Hampshire St, directly east of Mass St. in an attempt to monetize that prime location and ability to overlook Mass St.

One may have noticed the many streets named after States. Historic Lawrence, KS city planners named the streets in order of when they entered the union then the perpendicular streets consecutive

numbers. As Lawrence, KS grew past Iowa St. to the west the city planners “gave up” this pattern. However, as seen with the conflict of the Eldridge Hotel, Kansas has had a rough past with the Civil War even being titled Bleeding Kansas. Lawrence, KS sits near the Kansas Missouri border where Kansas was a Free State and Missouri was a Slave State, making Lawrence, KS a heated battlefield. Therefore, city planners recognized this bloody past by not including most Southern/ Slave states (strangely Missouri Street exists and is very close to downtown on the outskirts of KU Campus). According to local historian Steven Jansen, “Lawrence was one of few cities in America founded on wholly political premises, and the street names were intended to reflect that.” Besides location, Lawrence was especially targeted because of its reason for being founded. In fall 1854, the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society founded Lawrence to keep Kansas a free state. The Eldridge hotel was one of the first buildings constructed in 1855 and was heavily targeted in the raids from Missouri. It was completely burned to the ground twice and Colonel Eldridge rebuilt it twice, following his vow of adding a floor every time he rebuilt it.

The KU mascot is the fictional bird, the Jayhawk to also reflect the town’s history. Jayhawkers, known as Border Ruffians by people in Missouri, were the Kansas opposition to the Missouri Bushwhackers. Both sides have both positive and negative connotations especially with the Jayhawkers because while the Jayhawkers were fighting to abolish slavery, they were also partaking in raiding and looting of Missouri civilian towns. KU chooses to recognize the positive message the Jayhawkers were fighting for and KU and Lawrencians are very proud of this mascot, which has had many different renditions of it throughout the years. It is an important symbol to Lawrence and scattered throughout town are the “Jayhawks on Parade” statues where people always flock to to take pictures.

The history of Lawrence is ingrained into all Lawrencians, especially the ones growing up taking history classes there. Even the out of state KU student is faced with Lawrence’s history because everybody knows about the ghost of Colonel Eldridge residing on the fifth floor of the Eldridge hotel. It is advertised to prospective students and visiting families to stay in this historic hotel or to at least enjoy brunch in the open restaurant.

Something I found interesting is that for every single history class growing up in Lawrence, KS, there was always a unit on Lawrence’s history and Bleeding Kansas. However, in middle school I had a friend move from Raymore, Missouri, a town that was founded after the Civil War and had no battles occur on its soil, and while my history classes were heavily bashing Missouri and talking up the Jayhawkers, her classes

were condemning Kansas and the Jayhawkers, playing up their common negative connotations. Besides the biased history classes, it is fascinating how deeply ingrained this history is in Kansas and Missouri (even in a city that does not have the same past as Lawrence, KS) to where those old attitudes are still relevant today.