

Jordan Heller ~ One Of America's Poorest Cities Has A Radical Plan To Remake Itself



CLEVELAND — The last time Tymika Thomas' name appeared in newsprint was in connection with an elaborate 2012 robbery in the Cleveland suburb of

Wickliffe in which Thomas and two accomplices stole numerous handguns and more than \$30,000 in cash from a bookie.

Thomas, who knew the victim and was well aware that he kept a large amount of money in his home, took the man out for a night on the town while her partners broke into his house. Thomas and the man returned to find two armed robbers wearing ski masks. They absconded with the man's possessions and took Thomas as a hostage. The kidnapping was bogus, of course, meant to disabuse the victim of any suspicion that Thomas was involved.

"The judge called me the mastermind," says Thomas, now 42, dressed in a blue smock and a hair net that covers her thick blonde braids, before explaining her motive for the crime that earned her four years and nine months in prison — a sentence she completed last year. "We were all kind of in a rut, I had six kids and just lost my job, and we were just looking to get financially stable."

We are in the Evergreen Cooperative Laundry, located in Cleveland's Collinwood neighborhood on the east side of the city, a community that has long suffered from disinvestment. Despite her felony conviction ("Getting a job was my biggest fear," she says, "having to check that felony box"), Thomas is now a supervisor at the laundry, where she runs a crew that prepares packs of surgical linen for the Cleveland Clinic, the world-renowned hospital nearby.

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