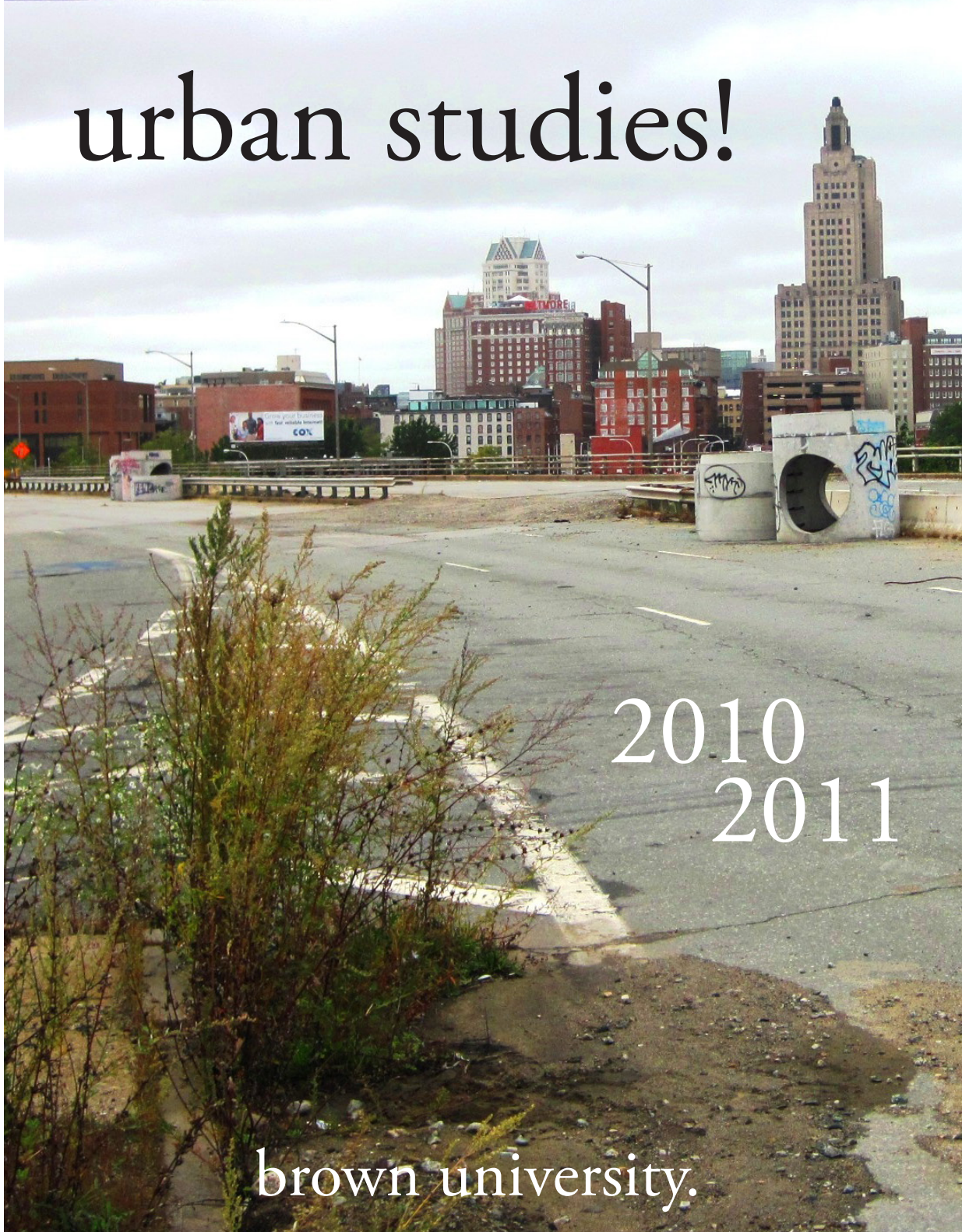




urban studies!



2010
2011

brown university.

INSIDE:

2 Editor's Note

Center-less Managua



3



Director's Welcome

I-195
Deconstruction



4



Abroad in Havana

Degree Days

5

T-shirts!

Arch-ventures

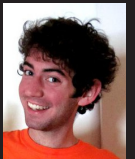


6

SENIOR THESES

"PVD Demolition"

"Boston's Big Dig"



7



"Hitchcock Cities"

"Urban Education"

"DC Projects"

Bike Racks

8

Urban Visions Conference

URBAN STUDIES



BROWN UNIVERSITY

Editor's Note // Searching for a Lost Center in Managua

gene goldstein-plessner '11 | gene.goldstein.plessner@gmail.com

Around this time last year, as I began my semester abroad, my Nicaraguan host family taught me how to wash clothes by hand, give directions according to the sun, and take showers using a bucket. I would have expected to need these skills had I been living in a rustic rural village, but this was a working-class neighborhood in Managua, a bustling metropolis with over 1.8 million residents. And yet, here in Nicaragua's capital city, my address roughly translated to "from where the Mundofri restaurant used to be, two blocks towards the sunrise, half a block towards the lake."



Downtown Managua, 1950¹

Unfortunately, water shortages and missing street signs are not Managua's biggest problems. The city is a sprawling collection of haphazard developments and commercial areas connected by wide auto-friendly boulevards and pockmarked by large expanses of dead space. Safe public spaces are non-existent and traveling anywhere by foot means taking your life in your hands, as there are no crosswalks and gaping holes appear in sidewalks where stolen manhole covers once lay. It's not a pretty city.

It wasn't always this way, however. In the 1960s and 70s, Managua was a thriving capital with a compact, vibrant city center, shared by tourists and locals alike. That was all destroyed on December 23, 1972 when a devastating earthquake struck the city, burying thousands alive and leveling the entire central business district. Due to an unfortunate sequence of political and economic circumstances, including a dic-

COVER PHOTO:

The old I-195 bridge, overgrown with weeds as it awaits demolition.

Photo by Gene Goldstein-Plessner

tatorship, a revolution, a U.S.-sponsored counter-revolution, and local government apathy, the city has never recovered. Arriving in the city 38 years after the quake, I decided to investigate how it changed the way Managua operates. I discovered that the city has become truly decentralized,

with the uses traditionally concentrated in a downtown inefficiently spread out across miles. Besides a few monuments, government buildings, and unused parks, the old center lies deserted. Commercial activity is focused in open-air markets in the four corners of the city and nightlife is concentrated in specific zones. The only safe "public spaces" that exist are located in the city's private malls, but even those are not truly public, as I learned when I was kicked out for trying to conduct a survey in one mall's "Central Plaza."

My experience in Managua showed me how much we take for granted as we study the way cities work, the role they play in our society, and strategize about how to perfect the urban experience. Returning to campus, I realized how lucky we are that we can concern ourselves with debates over the merits of gentrification, transit-oriented development, brownfield redevelopment and the like, while

urbanists in Managua struggle to convince their government that the urban way of life is something worth fighting for at all. This February, thanks to a grant from the Harriet David Goldberg '56 Endowment, I had the chance to travel to the University of Notre Dame to present my research at the Human Development Conference. I was honored to have my panel moderated by Ottón Solís, former Costa Rican presidential candidate, and my presentation was well-received. Learning from

the other 70 undergraduate researchers was exciting and inspiring as well.

On that note, welcome, fellow Urbanites, to the latest edition of Brown's Urban Studies Newsletter. My introduction here is just one of many stories, reports, and research summaries I've stuffed into these eight pages that show how we Urban Studies students have interacted with and learned from urban environments across the globe this year. Just a few blocks west of our home on Manning Walk, Sonja Boet-Whitaker '11 ponders the fate of an unused interstate bridge on page three, while on page four, Lizette Chaparro '12 travels back in time in Old Havana. Up the road in Boston, Molly Cousins '11 shares her experience helping build community in Boston on page five, our honors thesis candidates summarize their work that spans the country on pages six and seven, and still more contributors share pieces I'll let you discover on your own.

In addition to connecting readers with updates on the Urban Studies world, I hope this newsletter helps connect Urban Studies students and alumni who have



Driver's Ed students often use the deserted streets of the historic center for practice²

mutual interests with each other. If you have any questions or comments about anything you read, or just want to get in touch, I've included all the authors' email ad-

resses so you can track them down, and I encourage you to do so. Before I sign off, a few thank yous: to all the contributors for producing such top-notch work on their own time and to Heather Parker for her tremendous support in putting this newsletter together and for her all around awesomeness. With that, I'll leave you to take off on your own Urban Studies journey through these next six pages, an adventure that roams from the local to the global and back again. Bon voyage!

Director's Welcome

vernion henderson, interim director | vernion_henderson@brown.edu

This is a transitional year for Urban Studies. Pat Malone, who was Chair for the last few years, retired after many years of service to Brown. I am serving as interim Chair for a year, with Hilary Silver slated to take over next year. We are conducting two faculty searches this year to replace retirees in Sociology and American Civilization and to meet the growing student demand for Urban Studies.

39 concentrators will graduate this year, including several acknowledged at our first Midyear Completion event. Changes and new priorities may also emerge from our scheduled program review next year.

As one can tell from the articles in this newsletter, student involvement and engagement are strong, as many concentrators do work in the lo-



Prof. Henderson³

cal community, study abroad, complete research projects, and plan events. In the last 15 years, we have moved to incorporate more of a humanities side to the program, as well as enhance our offerings related to the built environment, broadening our historical social science approach. As we look to the future, internationalization and urbanization in the global south will be surely be an area upon which we need to build and a challenge for the program. All in all, it is an active and transforming time in Urban Studies at Brown.

Deconstruction/Reconstruction: I-195

sonja boet-whitaker '11 | sonjakbw@gmail.com

The abandoned section of I-195, which crosses the Providence River south of WaterFire but just north of Point St., has become a sacred place for me. This is where I come to see the real city, without the polished veneer of the Renaissance, the last place where I can savor my nostalgia for living in Amsterdam, where



The I-195 Bridge, pre-demolition⁴

I can pretend to be back there pretending to belong among the squatters. I go there to get perspective, to see the lights of the city over the water and the dark hulking forms of the empty power plants.

This wasteland, unwanted by buyers and by the city for at least two years, is being reimagined in the new image of urban revitalization. Rather than large-scale clearance projects or highway reshuffling, this is one project in urban development's new generation of smaller infill and adaptive reuse projects, which focuses on pedestrian accessibility and green space. This project would build on the existing highway bridge (that place where, in an attempt to capture the absurdity of walking in the middle of a highway, I have taken to lying down) and turn it into a bike

and pedestrian thoroughfare. It is another stitch to draw the sides of the river closer.

On Wednesday, November 3rd, in Providence City Hall, the eleven finalist designs for the bridge project were publicly unveiled. Perhaps you don't know Providence City Hall. It is forbidding and cold, grey stone that watches over Kennedy Plaza with a sneer. The front door was locked and closed off with an iron gate: public not welcome. Even the caterers had

trouble getting in, but with enough time spent banging at the doors, we got in, into the swirl of rich patterns and colors and brass banisters and an impressive staircase that drew us upwards. On the second floor: RISD-created textiles responding to the Providence built environment. Empty and quiet. On the third floor: Providence River Pedestrian Bridge competition. Bustling.

Once we were in, the democratic atmosphere surprised me. Well-known designers, politicians, and planners mixed anonymously with students like us. There were no nametags, and the posters were identified by design group number, also without names. We had to be careful

how loudly we voiced our criticisms, but it was the day after the elections, there was a vitality and energy in the crowd, and everyone was speaking loudly and excitedly. The first person who talked to us congratulated us on our bike helmets. He informed us he was keeping tabs on the designers, making sure they included bike lanes in the designs. He knew we would understand. He told us, those designers, sometimes they just don't care. Then he disappeared into the crowd.

The first poster board, at the top of the stairs, had a smooth, curving center path, with great sweeps of pavement coming off of it as though the designers had grabbed handfuls of the bridge's fabric and pulled it out into place: a sloping seating area, a great prow to overlook the city. Several designs



The bridge design finalists at City Hall⁵

played off of the WaterFire concept, making the bridge into stadium seating or a viewing platform for a drama that would unfold on the river itself. Some of the designs, though, looked as though they would immediately fall into disre-

continued on back page

Havana: A City Striving Among Ruins

lizette chaparro '12 | lizette_chaparro@brown.edu

Forty five minutes is less than any discussion section at Brown. It's less than the wait for Spring Weekend tickets and sometimes even less than the wait for chicken parm at the Ratty. Forty five minutes is also the amount of time it takes to leave the United States and enter an entirely different world: Cuba.

Tourism books and brochures describe Havana as a place where time has stood still since the triumph of the Revolution in 1959. While it may be true that 1958 Chevys abound and buildings from past centuries still stand, the city is certainly not frozen in time. Though change occurs slowly, it is taking place even on a small scale.

In the 90s, the loss of Soviet support left Cuba in a desperate economic situation. The country decided to welcome tourism as a way to produce revenue. Between 1994 and 1996, Cuba's revenues from tourism more than quadrupled. The Old Havana district received a great deal of attention because of its poor condition. Restoration projects soon began around the area. These projects, however, were focused primarily on improving tourist attractions. The residences in Old Havana did not immediately benefit from tourism revenues. Despite the increase in renovations, 30 percent of Old Havana residents did not have potable water in their homes in 1996.

Today, a short stroll down the peripheral streets of the district demonstrate the extent to which restoration funds are now helping the living situation of most Havana residents. Many houses are still in poor conditions, but change is arriving, albeit slowly. In recent years, the Office of the Historian of Havana, which manages tourism, has allocated part of its funds to improving the state of the community as

well. During that short stroll, it is also easy to see that many residents have taken it upon themselves to renovate their homes. Modest construction is visible on side-

walks, where wood and cinderblocks pile up.

In the meantime, Old Havana offers tourists many things to see, from the Museum of the Revolution, to the Museum of Fine Arts, plenty of restaurants and cafés, and cultural shows. Tourists can

be seen walking the

streets of Old Havana any month of the year, and they are visibly pleased. Havana's beauty, after all, can still be seen, even though it is a city partially in ruins. Decades of insufficient funds have caused difficult living conditions, but they have also saved historic buildings that would have otherwise been replaced by newer ones. The city has learned to embrace these old structures and is dedicated

to preserving its valuable architecture.

Time has never stood still in Havana. In the middle of cobblestone-exposed streets, next to decaying buildings from past centuries, there is a culture and an atmosphere that very much belongs to this decade. New music, even American music, plays from passing bicycle taxis and inside eateries. On every city block, there is some kind of construction. It is impossible to witness without being inspired by the resilience of a people who, despite great obstacles, continue to work steadily toward improving their city.



*A collapsed building near Old Havana*⁶



*Renovation along the Malecón in Havana*⁷

“Degree Days” Panel Report

allison pincus '10.5 | afpincus@gmail.com

The “Brown Degree Days” panel was held on April 8, 2010 this year. The panel, entitled “Life after Urban Studies”, included three former concentrators who told us how their experiences in Urban Studies influenced their professional lives. Dulari Tahbildar, class of 2000, Bob Pollock, class of 1990, and Bill Struever, class of 1974, spoke to a group of approximately 20 Urban Studies students about their career paths after they left Brown.

Tahbildar, the youngest Urban Studies graduate on the panel, currently the Executive Director of “Summerbridge”, located at the Wheeler School in Providence,

works with middle school students who are tutored by high school students interested in teaching. The school enjoys extremely high success rates, as 85% of middle school students end up attending college. Tahbildar told the group that she grew tired of working a desk job in Washington, DC, which led her to help start a school in New York and eventually led her to get her masters in planning, with a focus on education. Tahbildar gave

our group the advice that “it’s OK to quit your first job. You will get another one.”



*Dulari Tahbildar*⁸

continued on next page

continued from previous page

Pollock, who attended Brown as a RUE (resumed undergraduate education) student, decided on an Urban Studies concentration because it bridged his interests in real estate and architecture. Pollock announced at the event that he is planning to retire from Uptown Homes Real Estate, a company he created in Harlem, New York, and spend his time leading housing tours in Harlem.

Finally, Struever, a founder of Struever Brothers, Eccles and Rouse, talked with our group about his company's mixed-use development projects throughout the east coast. During the question and answer session at the end of the panel, Struever talked to our group about the betrayal he felt in Providence toward his company, after the revocation of the historic tax credit deeply hurt his company's development plans in Providence.

One of the most enjoyable parts of the evening was the reception beforehand; it was very nice to sit and eat with the speakers and have a chance for one-on-one discussion. There was great food, excited students, and motivated speakers. The evening was a great success!



*Bill Struever*⁹

About a year ago, I began working for Archventures, a brand-new nonprofit in Boston. Although technically only committed for the summer of 2010, I started work in March with researching and database maintenance – fairly typical “intern” tasks. I spent the summer in Cambridge and North End coffee shops (Archventures doesn't have an office... yet) and roaming around Roxbury and Jamaica

Plain with Steve, my Executive Director. In August, Steve asked me to lead the growing internship program as its Coordinator, a position I will continue in Spring 2011 for academic credit.

It's difficult to explain simply what Archventures does – it's a community-based, neighborhood-building, academically-oriented group of volunteers that serves Roxbury and Jamaica Plain nonprofits through provision of design-build services. Essentially, Archventures attempts to strengthen its target communities, both directly and indirectly, by supporting the nonprofits that community members rely on. Even the most well-known nonprofits in the area are forced to choose between paying employees, paying for supplies and programs, and paying for often critical building repairs and renovations. That's where Archventures comes in – it takes that element out of the equation. Our volunteer architects and architecture students team up to design each project, then our marketing and development teams fundraise with the partner nonprofit. Our volunteers help build the project, but we don't pick up and leave for good after the physical work is done. Ide-

Working with Archventures

molly cousins '11 | molly_cousins@brown.edu

ally, in the months of working together, a relationship with our partner organization is formed. The ultimate goal is to connect the neighborhood's nonprofits, residents, and community institutions together in a



*An Archventures intern teams up with a student in Roxbury, MA on a school renovation project*¹⁰

network of support and mutual benefit.

Last semester, Steve and I redesigned the way Archventures runs. It is now “intern-centric” – each team is composed almost entirely of interns from Boston-area universi-

ties. Those with architecture experience help design projects, those with marketing and public relations experience focus on publicity, those with development experience work on capital campaigns, etc. Each intern in turn receives academic credit from his or her institution while simultaneously practicing skills and putting their classroom knowledge to good use. All interns are overseen by an Advisory

Board composed of area young professionals in fields from real estate law to graphic design.

The idea driving Archventures is pretty cool. But how can my organization be sure that what it purports to do actually works? With



*An intern's rendering of a current Archventures renovation project.*¹¹

Archventures' new iteration ready to go next semester, it's the perfect time to evaluate the organization's efficacy. I will study nonprofit management strategies, fundraising and partnership techniques, nonprofits as service providers, and the relationships between the nonprofit “third sector” and the US government. With any luck, my findings will help further Archventures and its larger goals.

Urban Studies Apparel

No better way to be urban chic than in your Urban Studies T-shirt! The shirts contain the Urban Studies logo (pictured here), designed by our very own Amy Kendall '10. The t-shirts are white and available in S, M, L, XL, 2XL, and 3XL and are 100% cotton. One can be yours with a \$10 donation to Urban Studies. Contact Heather_Parker@brown.edu to arrange payment and delivery.



theses.

History Demolished

gene goldstein-plerter '11

gene.goldstein.plesser@gmail.com

Although Providence is known as a city with a rich historic preservation movement, not everybody here agrees on what it means to preserve or what it means to be historic. In my thesis, I take a look at the cases of three buildings in Providence that were approved for demolition despite the concerns of communities that sought to protect them and their history. The “place conflicts” that erupted over these demolition proposals offer insights into the power dynamics at play in the ongoing conversation about what gets preserved in the Renaissance city.

In addition to examining these past demolitions, I offer a summary of some current place conflicts in Providence, such as the debate over our working waterfront. I close by presenting a model for future preservation in Providence, a preservation philosophy that would keep Providence historically relevant for everybody.



Before the Big Dig

sam speroni '11 | samuel_speroni@brown.edu



The City of Boston is infamous for its most recent highway planning disaster: The Big Dig. Since the city and state first broke ground on the project to put the Central Artery (Interstate 93) expressway underground in 1991, Boston’s highway futurity has become a running joke. But an important question is often left unanswered: why did we need the Big Dig in the first place? Simply put, the Big Dig was a result of Massachusetts’ inability to complete its original highway plan. My thesis details the history of the plan and explains why its failure was in fact a blessing rather than a curse.

In 1948, Massachusetts developed its first Highway Master Plan, which called for seven radial expressways in a hub-and-spoke pattern, originating from an “Inner Belt” ring road that was to encircle the most densely-developed areas of Boston and Cambridge—including downtown and the Back Bay. It was widely recognized that the Central Artery project (the same highway that was put underground during the Big Dig) was of the utmost importance, and thus the DPW constructed it first, giving the country its first underground highway with access ramps. The Southeast Expressway, Northern Expressway and Turnpike extensions were completed, but as the right-of-way was cleared for the Southwest Expressway through the Roxbury and Jamaica Plain neighborhoods, protests from neighborhood interest groups erupted. Prominent political figures and well-regarded academics joined the fight and their outcries reached all the way up to the State House, where Governor Francis Sargent placed a moratorium in 1970 on highway construction inside the Route 128 belt.

Many might look at this story as a failure, but I believe it has actually prompted Boston’s success as it moves further into the new century. After the cancellation of the Southwest Expressway, the already-cleared right-of-way became a seven-mile-long park and transit corridor, as the Orange Line was re-routed to this land. Highways became much less of a priority, in fact so much so that the main downtown expressway went underground to get it out of the way. My argument is that controlling vehicular access to the city actually promotes good urbanism. By making it harder to reach the suburbs and outlying areas, Bostonians remain close to the downtown core. It makes the Boston area a more tightly-knit and less sprawled metropolitan area—a positive sign for the city’s future.

Hitchcock’s American Cities

maggie lange '11

maggiellange@gmail.com

For reasons unbeknownst to friends, family, or myself, I decided to work on a thesis whose subject matter terrifies me: Alfred Hitchcock’s filmic portrayal of urban space. Through examining Hitchcock’s films, I will analyze how the director reveals disquietude about the urban environment with his anxiety-driven films.

A final research paper for Professor Neumann’s Film Architecture class inspired my thesis, which will focus on American cities. For Film Architecture, I examined New York City apartment life through the lens of *Rear Window*. In addition to *Rear Window*, I will look at New York in *North by Northwest* and *Saboteur*, Washington DC in *Strangers on a Train*, San Francisco in *Vertigo* and *The Birds*, and Phoenix in *Psycho*.

While the films keep me up at night, I hope I can turn these late hours into some productive writing.



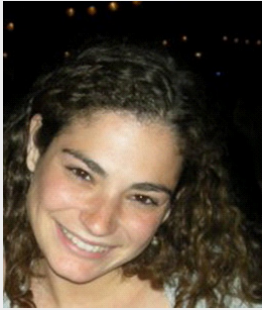
theses.

Narrowing the Achievement Gap in Boston's Public Schools

allison pincus '10.5 | afpincus@gmail.com

My thesis focuses on current urban education policy. I address the topic of narrowing the achievement gap by asking, "How are public school systems in the United States working to keep middle-class students in the public schools?" I focus on the city of Boston, Massachusetts for my study. Many researchers believe that socioeconomic diversity helps all students in a classroom, so I am examining Boston's effort to bring the middle-class back to Boston Public Schools.

In my report, I examine various school assignment options in cities across the country. I have researched charter and magnet school programs, as well as programs that are unique to the city of Boston, such as the METCO program, which removes students from the Boston Public Schools and places them in high performing suburban schools. I have also conducted interviews with school officials and nonprofit organizations in Boston that focus on education and the achievement gap. In my conclusion, I will assess Boston's effort compared to other cities to create socioeconomically diverse classrooms and will make recommendations for furthering this effort.



The Showpiece of our Nation

dan lurie '11 | dilurie@gmail.com

My thesis examines the motives that drove the demolition of a 552-acre parcel in the Southwest quadrant of Washington, D.C. in the 1950's and their expression in its reconstruction. Ostensibly, postwar urban renewal was completed to clear the American city of unsanitary, overcrowded, and dilapidated housing stock. The old Southwest quadrant was an optimal target for this program: it was full of densely-packed, substandard tenements.

Yet the reconstruction of this area was more than a practical effort to eradicate slums and blight. The tenements of the old quadrant were directly in the shadow of the symbolic heart – the Capitol and the Mall – of the national capital. D.C. is the face that the United States projects to the rest of the nation and to the world: in the Cold War, old Southwest was a blemish that could not be ignored. The seeming national and international significance of the project necessitated that the new Southwest showcase the most contemporary planning and architectural thought. Modernist heavyweights such as Louis Justement, I. M. Pei, and Marcel Breuer were engaged by the Redevelopment Land Agency to create "symbols of the republic." I posit that the government's primary goal in redeveloping the quadrant was to create a showcase of the prowess of American architecture and urban form.



DownCity Bicycle Hitches

stephen larrick '11
stephen_larrick@brown.edu

This past summer I worked as a part-time research intern at Cornish Associates, LLC, a New Urbanist real estate developer located in downtown Providence. As a college student with limited professional experience and no previous experience in real estate, I hardly expected my contributions to translate into tangible improvements to the urban environment. However, for one project in particular, the work I completed led to just this type of positive change. The City of Providence had been given funding to support an effort to make our city a more bicycle-friendly community.



*The new bike hitches in action in DownCity*¹²

One of the short term goals of this larger effort was to install more bicycle hitches downtown, and the City asked Cornish to come up with the locations. In an example of the benefits of working for a small firm, much of this task was assigned to me. I photographed and mapped 18 bicycle hitch locations, which I determined based on criteria such as distance from a preexisting hitch and by asking community members where they felt bike racks were needed. This information was then sent to the City, and many hitches have been installed already.

urban studies program
box 1833
brown university
providence, ri 02912

mailing address here

**Check our website for the latest
Urban Studies news!**

[http://www.brown.edu/
Departments/Urban_Studies/](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Urban_Studies/)

continued from page two

pair. Designs with dead-end paths or access to the piers at water level were tempting in their creative use of space, but the blind spots they created would be difficult to maintain and would, I imagined, quickly become dangerous. On the other end of the spectrum, bridges that created homogenous open space threatened to become an extension of Renaissance Providence: an unwelcoming bleak expanse, unable to attract the crowds of people it was clearly designed for. One common theme was the use of the bridge as a connection between small park areas on either side of the river, expanding the green space across the bridge.

This project feels like a legitimate attempt on the part of the city to cater to the needs and concerns of the people who live here. It almost makes me want to live here in this city for just a little bit longer, so that I can feel the stranded parts of the city come back together. I would accept this project as a replacement to the dirty gritty abandoned highway that I love.

Addendum: The final design, created by inFORM studio and Buro Happold, was selected in December, and deconstruction started before the winter storms hit. The design literature for this final design talks about “synthesizing traditional materials of granite and timber into programs that can feel both substantial and lacy”. Now, a phalanx of backhoes sits still on the bridge with their long necks curled. For the moment, the substantial programs are only these machines; the laciness belongs only to the sparkling, swirling snow.

Visions for Urban Development: What Makes Development Sustainable and Equitable?

March 11, 2011 1:00 - 5:00 PM

Granoff Center for the Creative Arts

This year's Urban Studies conference will include a keynote by Miquela Craytor, the Executive Director for Sustainable South Bronx, as well as two panels focusing on the qualities of good urban development and redevelopment plans. The first panel will discuss what constitutes sustainable and equitable development, and will feature speakers from three different perspectives: city planning, community-based development, and large-scale LEED construction projects. The second panel will showcase a series of case studies from the East Coast, including the East Providence Waterfront, recent work in West Philadelphia, and Jamaica Plain, Boston. We look forward to seeing you there!

Amelia Aboff '11 | amelia_aboff@brown.edu

Photo Credits

1: Managua Office of Patrimony; 2, 4, 5, and 12: Gene Goldstein-Plessner;
3: Urban Studies Program; 6 and 7: Lizette Chaparro;
8: Providence Business News; 9: Arts and Business Council of Rhode Island;
10 and 11: Archventures; Thesis pictures courtesy of the students.