

# URBN.

Edited by Blake Horne



*Providence, RI, Brown University*

## **CONTENTS**

*From the Department.....2*  
*Department Events.....4*  
*Upcoming Publication  
from Prof Pacewicz.....8*  
*Conversation with Prof  
Goldman.....10*  
*Prof Zipp with Harvard  
Prof Bruno Carvalho.....12*

# FROM THE DEPARTMENT

## Letter from the Director



Dear Students and Friends,

It is an honor to serve as Interim Director of the Urban Studies Program. I am especially proud of Blake Horne and other leaders in the Urban Studies DUG for the work they continue to do to make Urban Studies a vibrant and exciting concentration at Brown. The URBN Newsletter highlights how our program has continued to provide students with the analytical tools and practical experiences needed to understand and shape urban life. Urban Studies is deeply interdisciplinary. Whether it's offering a seminar on race and the urban environment with a humanistic emphasis or hosting a wide-ranging public discussion of the challenges of reporting on immigration policy in Minneapolis, the URBN Newsletter helps demonstrate the value of an urban studies education.

I hope you enjoy reading how our students are engaged and participating in the Urban Studies Program. Enjoy your summer!

Marion Orr

Interim Director, Urban Studies Program

# Letter from the Editor

Dear Colleagues,

It has been a pleasure to be the editor of the URBN newsletter this school year and an Urban Studies concentrator for the past two years. I've had my share of struggles, and this past year has been tough for all of us, but I've always felt very supported by our department. I would like to give special thanks Professor Marion Orr and Amanda Gratz for assisting in the creation of the newsletter, as well as the Urban Studies DUG for hosting many great events and helping to keep the department lively and active. To my fellow graduates, I hope that you all find great success after Brown. I hope you enjoy reading!

Blake Horne



*Providence, RI*

# DEPARTMENT EVENTS

## Gingerbread House Showdown

*Blake Horne*

Towards the end of last semester, amidst the stress of finals and the festive season, the URBN DUG held the Gingerbread House Showdown. Equipped with gingerbread, graham crackers, icing, and candy, we sought out to prove our artistic and architectural capabilities. However, our abilities to test the Providence bylaws were also challenged, as our constructions were to be judged by Deputy Director of the Providence Planning Department and URBN professor Robert Azar. The gingerbread houses had to abide by limitations regarding setbacks, height, and the many restrictions in the city's zoning ordinance.

There were many different designs pursued by the architects. Some people designed garages, ADUs, bridges, and I attempted to build towards the sky and create a landmark tower. Yet tragically, my tower, pictured to the right,

came crashing down, unable to support its own weight. It was majestic, although Professor Azar informed me that it would have violated the zoning ordinance anyway. Ultimately, only one of the houses, pictured above, would fully follow the ordinance, and that was the one that Prof. Azar constructed, as he would crown himself as the victor of the showdown. Ultimately, the showdown was a joyous occasion, and a great way for us to relax amidst our studies.



# Events in Minneapolis: A Conversation with Journalist Sofia Barnett

*Blake Horne*



In the midst of the social turmoil occurring in Minneapolis earlier this year, the Urban Studies department along with the Department of History hosted “Events in Minneapolis: A Conversation with Journalist Sofia Barnett.” Barnett, a Brown class of 2025 graduate, has been working for the Minnesota Star Tribune as a News and Politics Reporter for the past year. As such, she has been an eyewitness to the chaos that was plaguing the city during the first months of the year. In a conversation with Prof. Robert Self, Mary Ann Lippitt Professor of American History, Barnett is able to bring a unique perspective on the situation back to Brown. The conversation, which lasted approxi-

mately an hour and a half, spanned from the practical actions involved in fast and accurate reporting, as well as a broader discussion of the place of the media in modern America.

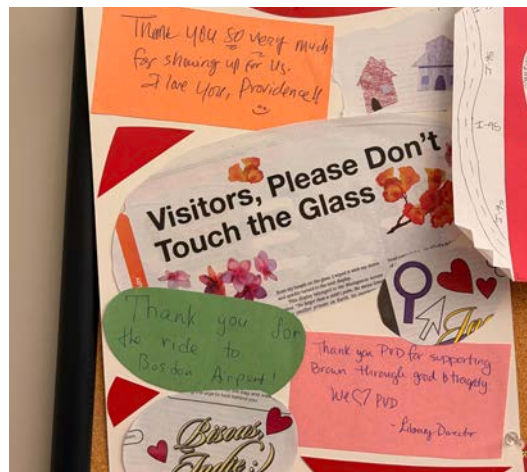
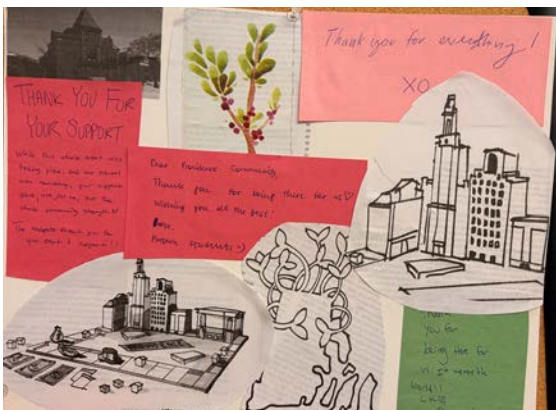
Barnett’s workflow, from Signal updates, to arriving at the scene, to sending drafts to her editor, suggests a sort of rapid response that is only truly possible at a local level. It is necessary for the media to be near and present for the news to be spread within minutes, and it is the fundamental building block of a national media that needs stories to rise up from the local level. Thus it is no surprise that Barnett is concerned with the health of local media in our current climate. When asked about the state of media particularly in the aftermath of the many attacks levied against it, Barnett believes that our national pillars of media will be fine, rather the current small media outlets, that are crucial to a healthy media ecosystem yet struggle to keep the lights on, are the most threatened. We must do our best to ensure that they can continue to operate. One of the most interesting moments of the conversation came when Barnett was asked about the need to stay impartial in the media. In this moment, she had to concede that it’s rather difficult, and that everybody has their own perspective. In her opinion, it’s important to recognize your own subjectivity and ultimately report what you see in front of you as plainly as possible.

# DEPARTMENT EVENTS

## Love Letters to Providence

*Blake Horne*

When tragedy befell our campus at the end of last semester, the whole city of Providence was able to come together and go above and beyond to provide us with the support we needed. This semester, in order to thank the city for all that they have done for us, the URBN DUG decided to collect notes from the student body showing their appreciation for the city. By leaving a drop box in the Rock during the month of February, the DUG gathered short letters that could be used to form collages celebrating Providence. Shortly before Spring Break, I joined the DUG to create these collages. Providence has always given us so much, long before the shooting of December 13th, and these letters are only a small token of our gratitude, but they demonstrate our endless admiration for our neighbors.



# Alumni Panel: Public Sector Urbanism

*Blake Horne*

Once again, the URBN DUG hosted the Urban Studies Alumni Panel. This year's edition focused on public sector urbanism, bringing together four alums currently working in the field to discuss their experiences. The panel included Lizette Chaparo '12, VP of Neighborhood Strategies at NYC Economic Development Corporation, Claiborne Walthall '02, Environmental & Land Use Law in the NY Attorney General Office, Sheila Nickolopoulos '97, Director of Policy & Legislative Affairs in the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing, and Justin Antos '03, Senior Director of Bus Transportation at the MBTA. The conversation primarily focused on how they eventually arrived in the public sector. There were many

commonalities across all of their stories; concentrating in urban studies but not being fully sure what they wanted, trying out different jobs, eventually going to graduate school and entering the public sector. The event provided an opportunity for students who seek to work in the public sector to get a sense of the paths open to them upon graduation, and define potential targets. One of the most surprising moments of the Alumni Panel was the question, "What is your biggest regret?" After being a bit taken back by it, the most common answer of the panelists was not making full use of their time at the university. Brown offers so much to us, and it is important to make the absolute most out of it.



# ***A Conversation with Professor Josh Pacewicz on his Upcoming Publication***

*Blake Horne*

As I began to brainstorm ideas for this semester's newsletter, I got word that Associate Professor of Sociology and Urban Studies Josh Pacewicz was currently at work on a new book. A graduate of the University of Chicago's Sociology department, Professor Pacewicz's upcoming book is tentatively titled *Architects of the Divided States* and is expected to release 2027. I sat down with him to hear more about it and how he went about researching and writing.

Blake Horne: Hello, Professor Pacewicz, thank you for speaking with me. Firstly, while I was referred to speak with you, I did not have any knowledge of what your project was about. So I suppose that the first question that I had is simply what are you working on?

Josh Pacewicz: The big thing I'm working on is my book manuscript. I'm supposed to send back the final copies this summer, and it's about what's been going on in state politics over the last two decades. And how does it relate to what's going on with our federal system in general? It's based on qualitative sociological case studies of Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Missouri, so it's a blue state, mixed state, and red state.

BH: How have you gone about those case studies? What are your research methods?

JP: I've been working on this since around 2016. It's been a lot of interviews, a lot of observations of hearing at the state house. The project uses various kinds of administrative data to fact check what people say against what the numbers actually show. The focus of the project is in the administrative, focusing on how people in states implement federal groups and policies.

BH: What sort of figures have you been interviewing? Is it politicians, advocates, something else, or just a broad mix of people?

JP: It's a broad mix. I initially played around with some different policy areas, but I came to focus on voting/election administration and Medicaid, which relates to most social services. I have interviewed some politicians, mainly legislators who are involved in committees that pertain to those issues. A lot of advocacy people, like think tanks and nonprofits. Also attorneys as the legal aspects of these issues are important, particularly voting rights. And then agency officials, and for voting election administration, many people don't realize this, but the important actors are actually county clerks.

BH: What inspired this? Was it a specific event or events?

JP: I was interested in how American politics is more and more polarized, right? We have this discourse of



red states versus blue states. And so I was essentially driven to investigate and see what's going on, and do a project around that. As soon as I started doing that project, I came to realize that a lot of that red state and blue state division was applied disproportionately to what was going on in the legislature, whereas a lot of what's important in kind of quote unquote state politics is actually driven by what state agencies do. And that can be quite decoupled from what's going on in state legislatures, because they have discretion over the interpretation of federal rights and programs, and also the interpretation of state law, and they can use that discretion to achieve outcomes that are different from what the law can do. So just to give you an obvious example, the state legislature in Missouri has passed some of the most restrictive voter laws, or tried to pass the most restrictive voter laws in the United States. Missouri is very polarized, like blue cities versus red countryside, and there is a racial divide along with that, right? So there's a lot of racist discourse, like "oh there's illegal voting going on in the city" and "we have to reign them in" and stuff like that. So the front stage politics is super polarized, but if you look at voter

registration rates and voter turnout rates, St. Louis actually has a higher rate of voter registration and voter turnout than like New York or Chicago and Providence for that matter. St. Louis County is really at the forefront of election modernization, they've done administrative tweaks that make it much easier to vote, that supersede or preempt a lot of what the state legislature is doing. County clerks essentially decide how the elections can be administered in practice, but most county clerks are underpaid, or they're out in a tiny county, doing not just election administration, but many other responsibilities, so they really don't have the time. So the people who tend to have the time and the resources to devote to developing models of what the law means and practice tend to be your county clerks for big cities, and they tend to be progressive Democrats, even in red states. And there's a similar thing going on with Medicaid, where there's an administrative backstage of means of expanding Medicaid programs, even in states that, on the face of it, oppose Obamacare, for instance.

BH: Wow, that all sounds fascinating. My final question is just, what do you hope readers will gain from the book:

JP: I hope they'll gain a better understanding of how state politics works and how complicated it is. There is a discourse that with the federal government where it is with the Trump administration, that we can and should look to state and local government as a check on federal, anti-democratic actions. And I think that's right, but I think if you take that position, then you have to really think carefully about how the government works.

BH: Thank you so much for your time.

# ***A Conversation with Professor Matthew Kateb Goldman on his Experience Teaching URBN 1290***

*Blake Horne*

At the start of this semester, a returning Urban Studies seminar was announced. URBN 1290 Race, Racism, and the Urban Environment was to be taught by Professor Matthew Kateb Goldman, who had just recently earned his Ph.D in American Studies. The course argues it is impossible to understand our past or present urban environments without a critical analysis of racial formation and transformation, and racialized value and resistance, and does so through the frameworks of urban planning and development; colonialism and empire; gentrification; cultural production and aesthetics; race and sexuality; and the policing of public space. The introduction of a new course to the concentration fascinated me, particularly since it incorporates more of a focus on humanities than the social sciences that make up Urban Studies. Thus, I decided to sit down with Professor Goldman to ask him a few questions about the course.

Blake Horne: How did you end up teaching this course?

Matthew Kateb Goldman: This class was originally taught by a scholar named Dr. Alex Werth, 3 years ago, in the spring of 2023. Alex is a wonderful junior scholar, as well as a practitioner of housing justice work, housing organizer in the Bay Area, his Ph.D is in geography, a perfectly very, very cool person and scholar. After he finished his Ph.D, he was hired by the urban studies program for a semester. He was given time to design and implement his own class. And so, this class originally was Alex's, I have to give credit for that. What I then did with this class was I intentionally tried to lend the foundations that Alex had taught with my own areas of expertise. So the class shifted a bit from a focus on, for instance, the history of housing, justice, and organizing to a little bit more theoretical foundations of race, racial difference, and racism in the Americas broadly, as a way of getting into some of those more nitty gritty historical, cultural, social, and policy questions.

BH: In regards to the additions that you made, when I shopped the class earlier, I think one of the things that I found interesting about it was that it was far more humanities focused than many of the urban studies seminars I have taken. Of course, Urban Studies is sort of a multidisciplinary concentration. We touch on a lot of different things, but I feel like this course provides something unique. So my second question was what do you hope that that sort of expertise is able to bring? How does it affect the urban studies experience of your students, as well as how do you feel it contributes to the broader urban studies curriculum?



MKG: I love being in an urban studies program at this moment in my career precisely because it is so transdisciplinary. And I feel really excited to contribute a more humanities touch, or a more humanistic angle. That is not lacking in anybody else's syllabi, but I do think that critical humanities focus is necessary for urban studies in conversation with the slightly more social scientific approaches that tend to define it, and that I do think are the strengths of the other urban studies, seminars, and lecture courses at Brown right now. So I feel honored to be alongside colleagues who really know their way around data sets, mapping technologies, a variety of other social scientific tools and epistemology for understanding the city. And I'm really excited to bring to those a little bit more of a focus on urban theory, a little bit more of a focus on critical race theory, and queer theory. And then even when it comes to our case studies, because we do use case studies in this critical urban humanities force, we read whole books about one neighborhood in a given city, but to still ground our approach in questions of human living experience, social and cultural thought, and cultural production, like art, music, literature, performance. All of that feels to me like a thrilling compliment to other urban studies approaches.

BH: With this slight shift in focus, your students are able to gain a different perspective and potentially different approaches than they might in other classes. How would you envision or how would you hope that your students would be able to carry that on into their other classes and then even beyond Brown?

MKG: I do believe that a deeply meaningfully critical life is crucial for all work that we do, but especially all work that we do in the realm of urbanism and urban life. Whether that is the most theoretical and conceptually motivated scholarship or absolute ground level planning, design, engineering, public health, across the wide array of things that our urban studies concentrators go on to do, even things that don't have anything not nominally to do with cities or urban studies. To be able to think critically about space and power is something that all our urban studies classes do from different angles. And my focus is that my students, join their peers and colleagues from across urban studies in really being able to apply critical witnesses to the every day, especially through these humanistic perspectives, to really be able to see cities and spaces, horizontally, not just vertically, and with critical care, compassion, insight, and collaboration.

BH: Thank you so much for your time, these have been great answers.

# *The Invention of the Future: Bruno Carvalho in conversation with Sandy Zipp*

*Blake Horne*

During his leave of absence, Professor Sandy Zipp, the Director of our Urban Studies Department, took some time to lead a conversation with Harvard Professor Bruno Carvalho on the subject of Carvalho's new book, in an event hosted by Symposium Books in Downtown Providence. Professor Carvalho, Co-Director of the Harvard Mellon Urban Initiative and Affiliated Professor in Urban Planning and Design at the Graduate School of Design, recently published his book *The Invention of the Future: A History of Cities in the Modern World*. His work inspects how cities have been shaped by competing visions of city dwellers for the future, dating all the way back to the 18th century and drawing a through line between events such as the rebuilding of Lisbon in 1755, Le Corbusier's plans for South American cities, the rise of the automobile, and modern day urban growth in Africa. Professor Carvalho seeks to demonstrate how radical visions of the future, both progressive and conservative, have been a major driving force in the development of urban environments. Professor Carvalho hopes that his book can inspire current planners and city dwellers to take on a more proactive approach to imagining the future of urban environments. A quote from Professor Carvalho that stood out to me was, "cities can slow us down against technology." Amidst rapid technological advancement, it's imperative to consider the future and imagine a city that can address its negative impacts.

