

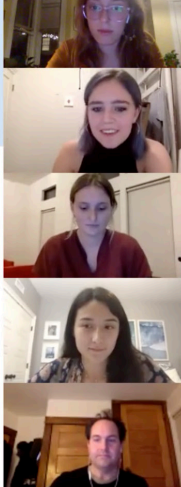
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A Crisis Within A Crisis:

The Effect of COVID-19 on Renters in Providence and Rhode Island

Amelia Anthony '22 + Phoebe Ayres '20.5

.....



Amelia and Phoebe (second and third from the top) share their research over Zoom

The Continuing Fight For Housing Justice Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

Thomas Wilson

On November 9th, the Urban Studies DUG hosted a panel discussion with Amelia Anthony ('22) and Phoebe Ayres ('20.5) to hear about their research on the impact of COVID-19 on renters in Providence and Rhode Island. Panel members included Amelia, Phoebe, Devra Levy (organizer with the Childhood Lead Action Project) and Abby Barton (HOPE member). Amelia and Phoebe shared a presentation showcasing the work they had done from June to August 2020, followed by comments from Devra and Abby and an open Q&A.

The work was done through a Brown Undergraduate Teaching and Research Award (UTRA) with Professor Samuel Zipp serving as Amelia and Phoebe's advisor. They used a mixed methods approach that focused on the immediate effects of COVID and its shutdowns. The UTRA was the third installment of a continuing undergraduate project that is working to better understand evictions in Rhode Island. This particular installment explored Rhode Island's response to housing insecurity in response to COVID-19.

» continued, PG. X

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SNEAK PEAK

From Maxcy Hall to Brown's campus to the City of Providence, the Urban Studies newsletter has it all:



PVD's Urban Tree Canopy

AN ANALYSIS of canopy distribution.

» continued, PG. 3



Walking Art Tour

FOLLOW THIS tour to discover all the art Providence has to offer.

» continued, PG. 4



Kenneth T. Mars

DISCOVER THE legacy of South Kingstown photographer

» continued, PG. 6

LETTERS

Letter from the Director

Hello Urban Studies,

2020 has been one of those years that will long live in human memory. As we turn towards the end of the semester, the holidays, and the end of this horrible year, I wanted to say a word of thanks to everyone in our community for all you've done to keep faith in the many ways that we work together. I hope that your participation in the life of Urban Studies has provided some consolation and connection during these troubled days. I know that it has for me.

I know all of you will join me in saying a particular and heartfelt word of thanks and gratitude to Meredith Chace Paine this year above all others! As soon as

Meredith arrived to take over the program manager position eight years ago, she became the heart of our operation. Class after class of urban studies concentrators have sought out Meredith for guidance and advice about their life in the program, and she has always been there. Whether it was over in our old house on Manning Walk in those first few years, or in her office on the first floor of Maxcy ever since, we've all been able to rely on Meredith to be the sun at the center of our Urban Studies solar system—the downtown at the core of our little metropolis. I know she has made my life easier in so many ways over the years, and particularly since I became director this summer.

Hard to imagine how we'll keep this all going without her, but I am sure you all join me in wishing her the best of luck for her retirement. The program will mark this big transition more formally in May, around graduation, but for now, huge thanks and congratulations Meredith, from me and the rest of the Urban Studies community you've done so much to create!

Happy Holidays to everyone. I hope you are able to make the coming weeks restful and productive, and to find ways to connect with family and friends, and that we all keep surviving in these trying times. And I hope to be able to see you all in person sometime in the new year, in better days!

-Sandy Zipp

Letter from the Editor

As Zipp said, suffice to say we have landed upon unprecedented times. Although we have been taking classes from the comfort of our couches, we find ourselves without the rewards of seeing friendly faces and peer to peer interactions that make our everyday life that much more purposeful. On top of that, we will dearly miss seeing Meredith in the front office when we eventually return to campus. Our color-coordinated library in Maxcy 109 will be a daily reminder of her impact on our department.

This year has made it more evident than ever that Urban Studies is important both as a discipline and as a tight-knit community at Brown. We all joke about the breadth of our department,

marketing ourselves on cover letters as true interdisciplinary scholars. There is, however, infinite value to this course of learning. Beyond the pandemic, this year has brought long-standing systemic issues of inequality and prejudice to light. The murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd are two more names on the unacceptably long list of victims of police brutality. This, and the exhausting course of the election, has made for a mentally overwhelming and infuriating year. However, there has been a silver lining in the community organizing and the immense amount of people joining the fight for equity. I hope that Urban Studies concentrators feel as empowered as I do to make a difference and create more vibrant



Meredith Chace Paine retires after eight years as our academic program manager. We wish her all the best!

urban spaces— a better “new normal.”

I have always been grateful for our tiny (but mighty) community and am excited to share this semester's newsletter with you. I look forward to seeing my peers in Maxcy again, eating donuts and brainstorming for a more equitable, sustainable, and harmonious future.

-Hanna Wells

FEATURES

Inequalities in Providence's Urban Tree Canopy

Megan Fay

Based on the most recent comprehensive study on urban tree canopy (UTC), done by the city of Providence in 2014, Providence's urban forest is made up of an estimated 415,000 trees with a tree cover of 23.9 percent. While these average values seem like Providence has a successful and robust urban forest, the distribution of the trees is not even. In fact, each neighborhood of Providence has its own distinct percentage of urban tree cover, with fairly drastic differences even just a block away from each other.

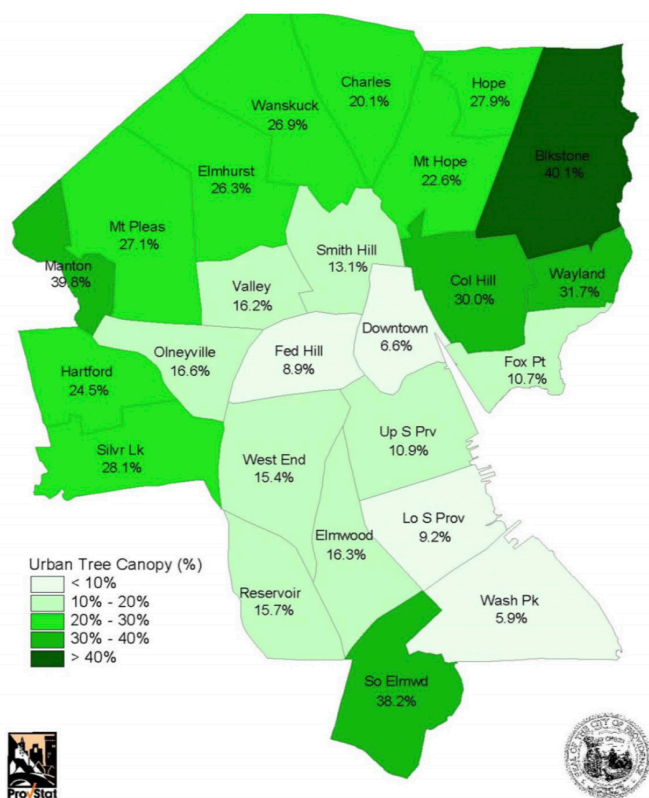
Similar to research done in other major US cities, data from Providence shows a disparity in tree coverage. As seen in Figure 1, neighborhoods that do not have

significant urban forestry (less than 10%) include: Downtown, Federal Hill, Lower South Providence, and Washington Park. These neighborhoods are the same ones that are threatened with current climate issues. They have higher temperatures because of the urban heat island effect, and higher levels of harmful air contaminants like tropospheric ozone and particulate matter. Urban forestry could help alleviate the negative effects by providing passive cooling through exterior shading and serving as a natural filter for air contaminants. Urban trees can also contribute to resilience of these neighborhoods. When temperatures or air pollution increase, trees serve as a buffer to mitigate harm. Rising sea levels

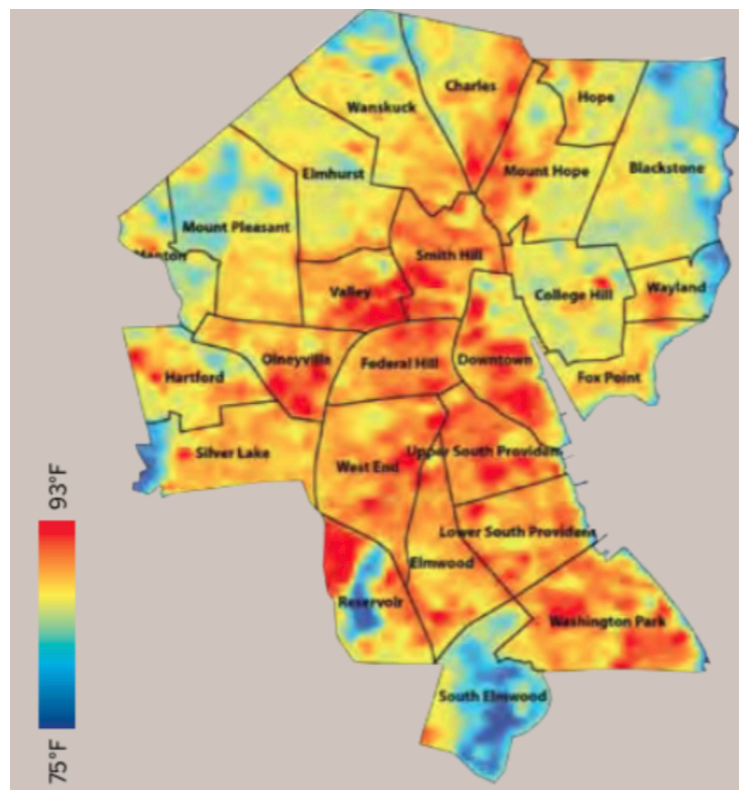
also pose a threat to those neighborhoods. Replacing impervious surfaces in these areas with soil and trees would help to manage the increase in water volume and prevent flood damage in homes and businesses.

In Providence, there are three ways to get trees planted. The primary way to obtain street trees is to apply to the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program (PNPP). It is a biannual planting program that people can apply for. In order to qualify applicants must gather a group of 5+ property owners in a small area, find planting sites, and find "Tree Stewards" who are willing to participate in planting day and care for the tree for the first two years

» TREES continued, PG. 9



Urban Tree Canopy by Percentage



Average Summer Surface Temperatures

FEATURES

Let's "Walk" About Art: a guided tour of public art and drinks

Kendall Krantz

Providence has a rich public art scene, but horrible winter weather. I love public art enough to walk a mile for a mural, but Providence is insanely cold. However, public art is one of the easiest (and cheapest!) pandemic-safe ways to get to know the city.

By carrying a coffee when I'm mural hunting, I fuel myself for long walks through downtown regardless of the weather. That's why I've compiled a handy guide to some of my favorite murals, complete with a coffee-crawl.

The first step to visiting downtown Providence is stepping off of College Hill. Head on down past RISD museum. You could stop at Bolt or Carr House, two popular study spots for Brown/RISD students, or keep going just a few more blocks. If you cross the bridge, you'll see two things: a mural covering the entire side of a building and RSpace café.

The mural, depicting a stunning young indigenous woman, is called *Still Here*. It's impossible to miss. The mural was painted by an artist named Gaia, and depicts



SOURCE: Juxtapoz Magazine, *Still Here*

a 25-year-old Providence resident named Lynsea Montanari (Finlay, 2019). Montanari is an educator at the Tomaquag Museum and worked with Gaia to select the portrait she's holding in the mural (Watch: *The Story Behind Gaia's "Still Here" Mural in Providence 2018*). The portrait she's holding depicts Princess Redwing, who was not only the founder of the Tomaquag Museum, but also "a Narragansett and Wampanoag elder, historian, folklorist and curator surrounded by native flora." (The Avenue Concept)

Still Here is part of The Avenue Concept series of public murals. This tour heavily focuses on works funded by the project.

The Avenue Concept is a non-profit with four goals: "Funding and supporting the creation and installation of artwork in public spaces, creating public art encounters by incorporating art more thoroughly into the urban environment and providing opportunities to engage and interact with it, developing programs,

policies, partnerships, and funding streams that make public art projects more viable and sustainable, and promoting art and telling stories through documentation, communication, education, and programming." (The Avenue Concept)

Still Here is also just a block away from the RSpace café, where the menu boasts of dirty rose lattes, dalgona matcha coffees, and an assortment of fresh fruit teas. The café is a clean, contemporary space with beautiful pastries and an overall eye for detail.

Our next stop is Andrew Hem's *Misty Blue*, another full-sized mural. The piece, painted by the son of Cambodian refugees who immigrated to escape the Khmer Rouge, celebrates Providence's strong Cambodian community. The model is a girl Hem saw in Cambodia, set against a brightly-colored, firefly-filled dreamscape. This piece is best viewed at night, when The Avenue concept lights up all of the artwork. The already surreal piece becomes a wonderland all its own.

» TOUR continued, pg. 10

Interning Remotely During COVID

Alicia Mies

This summer, I interned at Attorney Philip Walker's law firm in Torrington, Connecticut from my family home's basement in Palo Alto, California. As COVID-19 cases continued to climb throughout the country, I attended administrative meetings over Zoom and read case files for Attorney Walker's many child neglect and abuse cases.

These meetings were attended by social workers, administrators, lawyers on both sides of the cases and parents and foster parents while these cases largely involved parents with substance abuse or mental health problems who had neglected their children.

» INTERNSHIP continued, pg. 11

FEATURES

This Is My Home: How COVID-19 Shed a Light on the Homelessness Crisis in RI

Nell Salzman — Originally published in *The Indy* on 11/13/2020

Teisha Miller was without stable housing for nearly two years, but never saw the homeless crisis get as bad as it did this spring. “Living in my car, I got to see first-hand just how many people didn’t have a place to live—staying in cars, in tents, in the woods. This was just different. It’s getting really bad.”

Miller is a single mother with a six-year-old daughter. She moved from New York to Rhode Island in 2017, but struggled to find an affordable apartment. Due to her fibromyalgia—a chronic pain disorder that makes it difficult to stand or sit for long periods of time—Miller had a hard time finding and keeping a steady source of income and steady childcare. In 2018, she was fired from her job as an Uber driver because she had her daughter sitting in the third row of the car during a trip.

She recalled the long and arduous days she faced after losing her job. The food stamps that Miller received often weren’t sufficient because she didn’t have a place to cook or store what she could buy, so she relied on a family friend to bring her \$20 a day for gas money and extra food. She stayed in the parking lot of Home Depot, along with others who were also experiencing homelessness.

The pandemic only exacerbated her challenges. Before the city shut down, Miller and her daughter used to rely on public facilities at McDonald’s or Dunkin’ Donuts. “I suddenly couldn’t take

my baby anywhere to use the bathroom. I ended up having to put a bucket in my car,” she told the *Indy*. She and her daughter barely left their car due to fear of infection. On warm days, Miller would let her daughter play in the park, but they spent most of their time in her van. They didn’t even try to get into a shelter because they knew that there likely wasn’t space and that they may have faced greater health risks by living around more people.

Miller is just one of the many folks experiencing homelessness that has been affected by the pandemic. The state lost a record of 98,100 jobs in April and March, and though there has been some economic recovery since then, Hope of Hope Community Development Corporation reports that shelter demand has quadrupled since March. Due to social-distancing restrictions in shelters, there is even less space available for this growing population. Miller spoke for hundreds when she described the extra challenges she faced daily: finding places to eat or use the bathroom, the isolation, and the fear of getting sick with underlying health conditions and no medical support.

Eric Hirsch, an urban sociologist and professor at Providence College, explained that even before COVID-19 hit Rhode Island, rates of homelessness in the state were already getting worse. In 2019, 1,055 people were in shelters, nontraditional housing, or outside, according to a point-in-time

count conducted in January. In January 2020, the number increased to 1,104, with 108 people living outside.

By March, the situation worsened to an unprecedented degree. Hirsch attributed this to people not being able to pay rent, or having to leave doubled-up situations with friends and family for safety reasons. As COVID-19 cases went up, his first concern was the unsanitary and unsafe living conditions in the homeless shelters themselves. “In Harrington Hall, for example, there were 120 beds in one room. Bunk beds, cots, sometimes people on the floor in very dense conditions. We really needed to move people out of these situations,” he said. Over 140 permanent shelter beds have been lost across the state due to new COVID-19 safety protocols. In Pawtucket, the seasonal shelter at St. Paul’s has completely closed down, forcing folks to set up tents and makeshift shelters along the Seekonk river.

Hirsch has been looking at homeless rates since 1990 and said that what people are experiencing right now is worse than at any other point in his career. According to data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) collected about two weeks ago, there were at least 325 people documented as living outside. This number is probably at least 100 more than what has been accounted for, explained Hirsch, due to individuals that don’t want to have their names put in a database or that just simply haven’t been seen by service or outreach workers. This increase isn’t just numerical; it’s visible in

» HOME continued, pg. 12

FEATURES

The Lens of Kenneth T. Mars

Alina Kulman



His name was Kenneth T. Mars, Jr. He was of Narragansett and African-American descent. For 40 years, he worked as a janitor at the University of Rhode Island, and he spent much of his free time taking photos. The South County History Center in South Kingstown is the current steward of about 25,000 of his images of daily life in southern Rhode Island. The albums came marked with no captions of any kind.

The center's staff is painstakingly digitizing what is considered the largest surviving collection of vernacular photographs taken by a person of color in America.

No one who knew him or has studied the work—relatives, colleagues, friends, photography experts—has come up with any clear artists' statement that explains his practice. But many people are trying. As John Peterson, a local photographer and longtime Mars admirer, puts it: "Not every story needs to be understood, but it's made me nuts trying to figure out why he did it."

...

Kenneth T. Mars Jr. was born on March 29, 1940 in South Kingstown, a stone's throw from the ocean. His family were members of the Narragansett Tribe, an indigenous community that traces its history back in Southern New England ten thousand years. After enslaved people arrived with the first colonists in the 17th century, the tribe became intertwined

in complicated ways with people of African descent. Government documents often labeled Indigenous people as Black (and the two groups did intermarry), as part of a larger effort to deny ancestral connections to the land. By 1880, this practice of "detribalization" reached the point that the Rhode Island state legislature declared the Narragansett people "extinct" and removed their tribal status. Whatever ancestral lands they had left were seized. Legal challenges dragged on for decades, and by the time Mars was born, the Narragansett were officially reincorporated.



Photo of Kenneth T. Mars Sr. from his 1935 high school yearbook

Kenneth Jr. was an only child. His parents, Kenneth Mars Sr. and Lucille Greenwood Mars, were both tribe members. Kenneth Sr., a basketball star as a young man, worked as a carpenter. In the 1940s, Kenneth Sr. helped build a Pentecostal church, the Peace Dale First Church of God on Allens Avenue in Wakefield.

» MARS continued, pg. 14

As you walk beneath the trees,
Or stroll through Wilcox Park
You may feel me in the breeze
Or see specters in the dark.
I may be a shadow
Where no shadow should be
Do not be alarmed,
It's just a memory of me.

—John Christian Hopkins, "Memory of Me," Rhyme or Reason: Narragansett Poetry (2013)

...

If you had been driving anywhere in South Kingstown, Rhode Island—along a strip mall, or down a dirt road—from the 1960s through the early 2000s, you might have seen a thin, wiry man in a trench-coat on the sidewalk. Whether the scene was a gang of kids biking, a military parade, or autumn leaves falling, he would pull out his small, cheap camera. He would quickly capture the image, before continuing on his daily walk. Once he had the photos developed, he would neatly glue the prints into hundreds of chronological albums.

COLLEGE HILL UPDATES

In Brief...

While we have no updates from Fane Tower (for better or for worse) or the Superman Building, our abandoned drawbridge is finally getting a facelift. In late October, the City issued an open call to solicit creative ideas for the future reuse of the Crook Point Bascule

Bridge. It is currently owned by the Rhode Island Department of Public Transportation, yet the Providence Redevelopment Agency hopes to take ownership to prevent its demolition through this design call. The winning design will be announced late March! There is still no sign of a Trader Joe's.



SOURCE: ArchDaily

Thayer sees turnover as some retailers close, others open amid pandemic

Ben Glickman – Originally published in The Herald on 9/8/2020



SOURCE: The Brown Daily Herald

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought swift change to Thayer Street: as small retailers and restaurants struggled, some chains and franchises have opened their doors.

Faced with dwindling profits and high rent, independent retailers like Pie in the Sky were forced to close, said store owner Ann Dusseault. Meanwhile, Warby Parker, a national glasses chain, is preparing to open a store on Thayer St. before the end of the year. The cozy Korean eatery, Soban, along with the hole-in-the-wall sushi joint, Sushi Express, have closed their Thayer locations since University students departed campus.

Pie in the Sky, a jewelry and gift boutique, closed down in May after 27 years on Thayer Street. Dusseault, who has owned

the store since it opened, said she made no profit for two months during the pandemic and could not afford to pay rent.

"I just couldn't do it because I would have been scraping together rent just to hand it over" to her landlord, Dusseault said, "with no profit for me." Dusseault said that it has become more and more difficult to be an independent retailer on Thayer Street because of chain retail and restaurants. Franchises can afford to pay more in rent, so landlords prefer them, Dusseault said.

Dusseault, who hung a "Keep Thayer Weird" sign in her shop, views the closing of her store as part of the movement away from independent shops on Thayer. "Everything was indie back then (when I first opened), and slowly that's disappeared," she said. Dusseault plans to open a new vintage shop with a friend, and is currently looking for a storefront on the East Side of Providence. She continues to sell her jewelry on social media.

Pie in the Sky is not the only independent shop on Thayer to close its doors. Impact Everything,

a socially-conscious retailer on Thayer Street, announced last month in a Facebook post that it would close its Providence store. The shop, which was established in 2016, aims to support social causes with donations and volunteering trips. The store's website will continue to operate, and the owners said in their Facebook post that "once things have settled, we are going to open our storefront a second time." The store's owners did not respond to requests for comment by time of publishing.

Donna Personeus, executive director of the Thayer Street District Management Authority, says that business turnover is always to be expected on the University's student thoroughfare, even without accounting for the pandemic. "Openings and closings are part of the business cycle of a business district," Personeus wrote in an email to The Herald. "Thayer has 71 business locations, there will always be change happening. Businesses will come and go for different reasons."

FROM CAMPUS



SOURCE: Providence Daily Dose *Maxcy Hall, just in case you forgot what it looks like*

In Brief...

Though campus has seemingly been at a standstill, there are many developments happening both on campus and in the city. On campus, the Performing Arts Center is well underway: the final steel beam was lifted into place at the end of the semester. Otherwise, Brown's carbon emissions reduction plan is changing campus for the better. The thermal efficiency project has been completed, updated the heating system of all campus buildings. •

"Returning to the Just City" with Professor Carter

Thomas Wilson

This spring, the Urban Studies Department is offering another opportunity for students to explore what makes a city just. After a successful run teaching "The Just City (Installment I): Comparative Perspectives on Juvenile Justice Reform" in the spring of 2020, Professor Rebecca Carter is back with a second installment focusing on "Crossroads and Congregations" (URBN 1934).

Installment II of "The Just City" is an investigation into how the physical and metaphorical spaces of a city can be used to transform justice and equality. Over the semester, the course will explore "the spatial imaginaries of injustice found across the urban landscape and [work] to uncover the specific routes, intersections, and sites of convergence activated in its necessary transformation." Professor Carter notes that crossroads will be a particularly useful to analyze, as

they function as both physical pathways while also being symbolic for moments of change. Though she conceived "Crossroads and Congregations" before the COVID-19 Pandemic, Professor Carter is excited to reflect on the ways that physical distancing has impacted both of course's namesake factors.

Throughout the semester, Professor Carter plans to center the creative process as a means of helping students develop both creative and critical tools of analysis. This focus on creativity was also evident in "Comparative Perspectives on Juvenile Justice Reform", where students collaborated on works of art to help visualize and understand complex themes.

The series stems from Professor Carter's continued interest in "trying to understand equality and the possibility of freedom in an urban context." Describing her

courses as "think tanks", Professor Carter has always attempted to focus on drawing out the thoughts and feedback of her students in order to allow the academic experience to organically develop. Plans for a third installment of "The Just City" are in the works, and beyond that Professor Carter is interested in compiling the experiences of students across all three courses of the series. •



One example of collaborative artwork from "Comparative Perspectives on Juvenile Justice Reform"

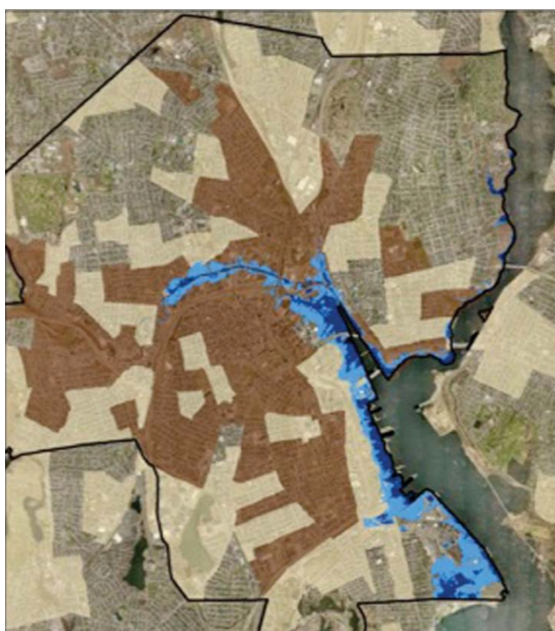
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TREES cont.

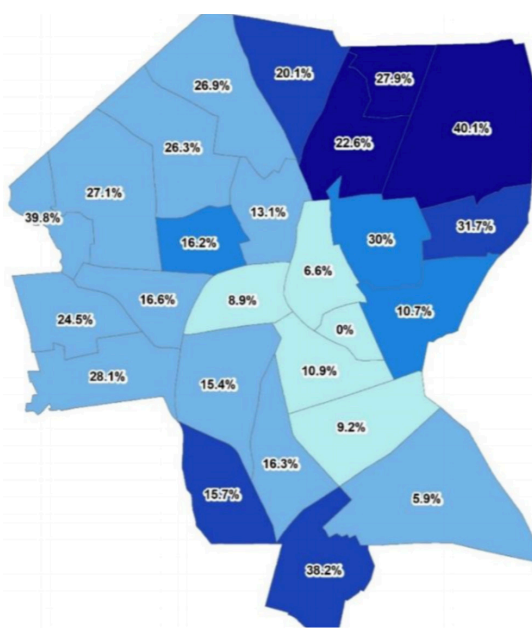
The goal of PNPP is to award as many applicants as possible with 5-25 trees prioritizing applicants from low-canopy neighborhoods, “creating an equitable urban forest”. Another option would be requesting a “Plant-It-Yourself” permit from this city. With this arrangement, property owners would purchase a tree of one of the pre-approved species, plant in the site approved by the city, and care for their trees themselves. The third option is Providence’s city “match cost” program. The cost to homeowners is currently \$250 per tree, which the City will match. The Parks Department will prepare the sidewalk for planting, purchase the tree, and plant it in the appropriate season. With the methods of planting laid out, the next step was to investigate why they are not being planted in the low-canopy neighborhoods identified earlier.

The neighborhoods where urban tree canopy would provide the most utility and improve resilience significantly are the same neighborhoods that do not have forestry. These low-income neighborhoods in Providence are in close proximity to the highways, fossil fuel infrastructure, and diesel burning ships and large petrochemical tanks near the port. They face negative externalities associated with fossil fuel based industries. Residents in these areas might not have the resources to purchase, construct, and care for their own green spaces. The city’s planting methods should increase the amount of involvement from people from these neighborhoods. While PNPP is prioritizing applicants from low-canopy neighborhoods, the program is flawed in that it requires the property owners to be the primary organizers, when these people might not have incentives, they might not live and work in the neighborhoods they own property in.

This organization structure makes it difficult for residents or business owners to organize and advocate for themselves and their neighborhood. Additionally, requiring the time commitment to plant and care for the trees might not be the most equitable decision for the organization. Low-income neighborhoods cannot subsidize free work in the form of the Tree Steward role. The full cost Plant-It-Yourself permit is not realistic either. It would take time to plant and care for a sapling, the cost of trees that are already fully grown averages between \$100 and \$500, and hiring someone to help with the planting process can add hundreds of dollars to that cost. The city’s “match cost program” alleviates half of the money and all of the time, but there are only a limited number of trees that are available through this program each year. Additionally, both of the city programs, like PNPP, require the property owner to organize and pay.



Expected Areas to be Impacted by Sea Level Rise



Median Household Income by Neighborhood (blue) and UTC (%)

Seeing the gaps between Providence’s current work and their goals of even urban canopy distribution, it was important to find case studies of successful equitable planting programs. In my full paper I pluck out desirable aspects of planting programs that could be incorporated into Providence’s current system. Programs included projects in Portland, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland. •

CONTINUED

TOUR cont.

Similarly beautiful at night is the series *We Are One Flock*. Located on the Weybosset facade, this painting depicts birds in both 2D and 3D. This cluster of paintings literally jumps out of its frame, as painted wooden cutouts of migratory birds allow the subjects to move between panels. These lifelike birds are products of Amy Bartlett Wright's signature realism in wildlife and nature scenes. This mural gives the sense of an open space among brick facades.

By the time you find these *Misty Blue* and *We Are one Flock*, you're probably going to be pretty cold. The next coffeeshop locally owned and sustainable shop. The owners, Anne and Adam, still work the register and strive to make a positive impact on the Providence community. Their website boasts that they prioritize sourcing local ingredients, such as "eggs from Baffoni Farm, apples and cider sourced seasonally from Barden orchard, cheese, butter and yogurt from Cabot and Narragansett Creamery, organic fair trade coffee from Equal Exchange, and fresh local milk."

Once you've found coffee, it's time to find *Adventure Time*, a technicolor mural by Natalia Rak, a young Polish street artist (City of Providence Downtown Public Art Walking Tour 2020). The mural focuses around how "she felt 'the magic of a large surface,' which is visible in the surreal psychedelia of the world the girl is poised to enter." (The Avenue Concept) It also has an Easter egg for the show by the same name. A little yellow dog

(called Jake in the show) peeps out of a young girl's backpack as she gazes into a mushroom forest through a blue and purple door frame.

The next piece is a bit of a hike. Located on 1 Ship St., the piece *VOTE* is a contemporary masterpiece. The piece is a collaboration of four BIPOC artists: Angela Gonzalez, Kendel Joseph, Jessica Brown, and ABOVE. Each designed a letter with the intent to inspire political change. Some familiar faces on the mural are Justice Ameer Gaines and Rep. John Lewis. There is also an interactive "QR code that directs to the voter registration page on the Rhode Island Secretary of State's website." (The Avenue Concept)

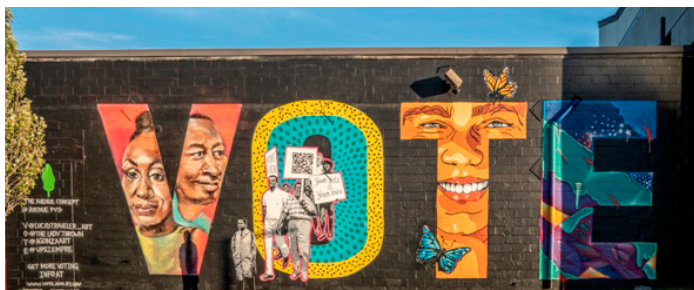
For our 21+ readers, this next stop is for you. An entire external wall of *Tiny Bar* is actually dedicated to The Avenue Concept. *Blue Moon* sits on the patio of the bar, which also serves snacks. The owner, Joanne Chang, is a Harvard-educated baker who sought to create "the coziest space" by fulfilling the need for feminine spaces in the Providence downtown area. (Coelho, 2019) *Blue Moon* is painted in bluescale, and depicts profiles of three figures adorned with images which evoke the day and night. It was created in 2020 by artist Michael Ezzel, a printmaker

"explores esoteric symbolism and mysticism, weaving characters and icons reminiscent of Greek and Roman myths into new narratives and worlds," according to his website. His focus on escapism also bleeds into his Etsy shop, *Paper Shuttle*, where he creates a variety of home goods to turn your student apartment into a dreamland. This mural was meant to change out every four months, but it's unclear whether that will happen at the moment.

Last on the list is *Small Format*, a newer café up on Wickenden open Thursday through Monday. This café, described by the owners as "a queer-cooperatively run open-air gallery, and exhibition room that offers a mood-bar, cafe, and snackery," serves a wide variety of creative drinks (both alcoholic and not) and delicious foods to fit any diet. The outside boasts a large mural, and the interior has both contemporary art and portraits of figures such as Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Angela Davis. My favorite drink here is tied between the "Civil Union" latte and the "Cattachino," a catnip tea latte.

Bonus: The unlabeled *Trunkshrooms*. Sometime in Summer 2020, someone carved a number of tree trunks in public parks into little rough-cut mushrooms. A friend once told me that it was a RISD student, but the sculptures are

completely unlabeled. I've spotted two so far: one near Hope St. Farmer's market, and one at India Point Park. •



SOURCE: I Support Street art

CONTINUED

INTERNSHIP cont.

While interning at a law office 3,000 miles away would have been considered unusual pre-COVID-19, during the pandemic it felt like the only possible option. It was a strange and isolating yet intimate experience. The only contact I got with clients was through reading their incredibly personal case files — files that detailed clients' fraught relationships with their parents, history of substance abuse and "failings" as parents — and listening to their voices sounding out quick "yes's" and "no's" to their case worker's questions over conference calls. Most judges and lawyers that I worked alongside never even saw my face. Whenever I entered a meeting with my camera off, other lawyers and case workers in the Google Meets call would confusingly ask "Who is Alicia... Mies?" To which I would reply, "I am Attorney Walker's intern here to observe the call." Every time, they would joyfully welcome me into their virtual office space. While these judges, lawyers and case workers never saw my face, I became intimately familiar with their living spaces and personal lives. I could hear a lawyer's dog barking the background. I was able to listen in on another lawyer talking about her pregnancy with her peers. In the background of my boss's Zoom call, I could see the interior of his rustic-looking log cabin. As millions of other "work-from-homers" in the U.S. can attest to, the once rigid lines between the work and the personal were being blurred even for an intern like me. •

Would You Like to Wash Your Fears Away?

Hanna Wells



Over the summer I interned remotely for Illegal Art, a participatory-based art public organization. On October 5th, I facilitated one of their new projects, Wash Away Your Fears, near the pedestrian bridge in Providence. Participants wrote down their fears, then washed them away with a bucket of water and a broom, effectively purging themselves of their fear or confronting it in writing. This project has since been facilitated in Manhattan with the Tenement Museum.

THAYER cont.

Personeus said she is excited about the Warby Parker store opening. "We are thrilled to welcome Warby Parker to the street before the end of the year," she wrote. "They will be a great addition to our community."

In addition to Warby Parker, tea shop Ten One Tea House had its grand opening on July 18 and 19. The shop is located at 216 Thayer St., in the space formerly occupied by GNC, a nutrition and exercise supplement store. Jason Yu, owner of Ten One Tea House, says that the shop had a successful opening despite the pandemic, which he credits to loosening restrictions in June. The shop's opening date was pushed back from May to July, Yu wrote in an email to The Herald. Ten One Tea House is the fourth tea shop in the area, facing competition from Vivi Bubble Tea and Ceremony Tea House on Thayer, as well as Kung Fu Tea on Waterman. "Each (tea shop) has its own strengths, and they're very different

from each other," said Vivian Van '21, who started working at Ten One Tea House over the summer.

The original Ten One Tea House is in Boston, and Yu says that he chose Thayer St. for a second location because of the regular foot traffic, describing it in an email as "huge all year round." Van is sorry to see smaller retail shops like Pie in the Sky and Impact Everything close down, but she says that the change might be for good reason. "Food is a constant," she said. "I think that's why (the food industry) has been stable."

While some mourn the loss of a "weird" Thayer St., Personeus sees change as necessary. "One of the magical things about Thayer Street, it is forever evolving," she wrote. •

Since this article was published, the Army-Navy store has closed. Soban reopened with a new menu, and is now called bb.q Chicken + Soban Korean Eatery.

HOME cont.

the countless homeless encampments that are popping up around the state, like the Home Depot parking lot that Miller lived in. An encampment, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, is a group of people staying in temporary structures or enclosed places that are not intended for long-term continuous occupancy. Sara Melucci, the outreach program manager with House of Hope Community Development Corporation, said their outreach team has counted at least 30 alone in the State of Rhode Island.

Melucci said that the people she works with commonly question the highly coordinated response to the COVID-19 crisis, but there hasn't been a coordinated effort to respond to the homeless crisis in Rhode Island for years. "We can change a whole way of life to respond to a very real crisis like COVID, but where was this coordination of care for the homeless before?" she asked. "People are frustrated. They don't feel heard." While the state has promised that there will be more shelter beds in the coming months of winter, she said it's still not forecasted to meet need. With the weather worsening, Melucci hopes that Governor Gina Raimondo will do whatever it takes to get people safe and inside.

Hirsch gave Governor Raimondo credit for opening up three hotels at the beginning of the pandemic to reduce density in homeless shelters. In early July, however, these hotels closed, and folks were moved back into shelters. Now, the state currently only has one hotel reserved for isolating housing insecure folks who are symptomatic. "They certainly stepped up with the

hotel program, and they need to step up again," Hirsch said. Homelessness is always a crisis and shelters are always overwhelmed. So, Hirsch asked, why can't there be year round state-run hotels?

Melucci said that House of Hope CDC has engaged with homeless shelters and other organizations to organize meal deliveries and extra support during this time. When state bureaucracies don't step up to the plate to provide relief and support, it's up to local organizations like House of Hope CDC to do so. But this leaves resources stretched impossibly thin. "Our outreach team is a team of six case-workers. We're used to dealing with 150 people at a time, and now we have four to five hundred people at a time. It really limits what we can do reasonably for each person," Melucci said.

These organizations are the glue holding the state homelessness crisis together. Miller, for example, was only able to find affordable housing in September of this year with the guidance of the House of Hope CDC. Personally, she feels let down by the state's commitment to helping the homeless. "They tell us they'll help us and then sit up there with their \$1,000 dollar furniture and don't actually change anything!" she said. In an era filled with disaster, more and more local organizations are providing immediate relief to those that need it most. And though there is power and sovereignty in community support, Miller pointed out that local organizing is tied to state failure to help in a time of need.

Hirsch looks specifically to the state legislature for housing accommodation help, emphasizing the lack of a housing bond on

this November's ballot. He also critiqued Raimondo's cabinet, pointing out that there's currently no housing department to oversee the building and rehabilitation of housing. According to Hirsch, community development at the state level is simply buried in the commerce department, and thus beholden to interests of stakeholders that support the growth of the economy over affordable housing solutions.

Prioritizing housing comes down to a shift in budget priorities, Hirsch told the Indy. At a House Finance Committee meeting in July of this year, Rhode Island residents called for a cut in funding for state prisons to move dollars to areas like affordable housing. In letter testimony, people called for the closing of the state's ACI High Security Center, which costs about \$200,000 per inmate. Governor Raimondo estimated that the state could save \$800,000 dollars by reducing high security spending and exchanging high security inmates with other states. A budget that prioritizes affordable housing solutions over criminalization is essential to ending long-term homelessness for both individuals and families.

"Homelessness is a lack of housing. That's what it is at its core," said Melucci. Right now, House of Hope CDC has had to focus on short-term solutions, given that so many extra shelter beds are needed. But Melucci knows that a lot more advocacy work needs to be done for affordable housing in Rhode Island. She described the immediacy of her day-to-day work: "How do I even think about doing long-term planning when I'm sitting in front of someone who's going to sleep outside tonight?"

HOME cont.

Hirsch advocates for a “Housing First” solution, where people experiencing homelessness are immediately put into an apartment. He pointed to two key things that are needed to help mitigate homelessness—more rental subsidies and more affordable housing units. He knows that if there was a stronger commitment to these goals, there would be less people living on the street. For Hirsch, the stagnancy comes from unbalanced political power. “Landlords and realtors have much more power in the state legislature than homeless people or low-income renters do,” he said.

Publicly-subsidized housing units would lower the cost of rent. For a housing developer or landlord, he pointed out, this means less profit. “They’re perfectly happy to tolerate homelessness if it keeps their profits up,” he said. “I really think it’s about profits over people.”

He believes that a private housing market is ultimately always geared towards individuals who are more well-off. But he pointed out that his housing model is actually more cost-effective over time, simply because of the fiscal resources needed to support those on the streets or in shelters.

In a 2019 report on homelessness in Rhode Island, Hirsch detailed policy recommendations for Rhode Island to transition from being a shelter state to a permanent housing state. These include doubling rapid re-Housing from \$2 million to \$4 million (short-term rental assistance), funding 100 low restriction permanent rental subsidies, building or rehabilitating low-income housing units, and creating a cabinet level department of housing.

Right now, Hirsch said it’s not being prioritized: “We’re looking at a situation in which shelters

are not only full, but public housing is pretty much full, too. We’re just not building enough new housing options for low-income people and families.”

Melucci explained that true governmental action and prioritization will only be spurred by communication and advocacy from Rhode Islanders themselves: “Talk to your neighbors experiencing homelessness. Look them in the eye. Get involved and educate yourself about what’s going on. Call your state representative and senator and tell them to support the housing initiative.”

Miller thinks about all the people she met while experiencing homelessness herself. “You’d be surprised how many people are living in their cars with kids. I know women who are in my exact situation, with one or two children. I know how it is. It’s really hard. It’s really scary,” she said. •

PANEL cont.

In order to analyze this issue, they used publicly available eviction data to calculate the “COVID eviction rate” by ZIP code. They also created a renter survey that was advertised throughout the city on flyers with a QR code. This 25-question anonymous survey served to better understand the effects of COVID-19 on renters, demographic information, and personal testimonials. Within the month that this survey took place (July 2020), there was no correlation between COVID rates and eviction rates by ZIP code. The presentation ended with a list of recommendations, including an extended eviction moratorium and cancellation of rent payments during the pandemic and a right

to counsel in eviction court. All of their work was compiled into a report, recommending the policy and budget changes to the Providence City Council and Rhode Island State Legislature.

The panel itself emphasized the need for a continuing fight for housing justice in RI. Devra Levy discussed the importance of tenant organizing in the face of the current situation. She noted that even while additional support systems and funding mechanisms have been put in place during the pandemic, the venues of accessing these are still confusing and inaccessible. Abby Barton talked about the CDC’s “eviction moratorium”, stressing how it is limited in scope as it was

designed for a specific class of renters. Rhode Island housing advocates have been trying to equalize this for renters with the most need, but it is and will continue to be an ongoing challenge. •

To read more about the work Amelia and Phoebe conducted, check out their article, “The Crisis within a Crisis,” published in the Indy on 10/2/2020.

MARS cont.

The white-trimmed red brick building is on a sleepy, tree-lined street. Silvermoon LaRose, a cousin of the Marses, is the assistant director of the Tomaquag Museum in Exeter, Rhode Island, dedicated to indigenous art, history, and culture. She explained that carpentry was a family business, noting, "Building that church was a family and community project."

In 1962, at age 22, Mars began working at the University of Rhode Island as a janitor at the student center, the Memorial Union building. A state resolution on the eve of his retirement 40 years later noted that as "door opener and official greeter whose concern is always the students, Kenny takes it upon himself to see that the Union is opened earlier than the official opening time, 'so the kids can get in out of the cold.'" The resolution also documented his photography hobby, recalling him "leaping from behind a column and firing off his infernal flash" to take surprise pictures of his colleagues.

John Peterson first encountered Mars in the Memorial Union building, where Peterson's father also worked as a janitor. "They came in at the same year," Peterson explained. "My dad liked him, just thought he was a kind and gentle guy. They talked politics, they never talked about photography." Peterson, now 48, vividly remembers the childhood encounters with Mars: "When I was a little kid I'd spend time with my dad and my dad would talk to him. As a child, I'd see him in town with a trenchcoat and a camera. He was shooting

things that didn't make sense to a five year old. He looks almost like a sleuth in his coat, taking these pictures."

Mars cultivated his photography habit outside the walls of URI and the local library. LaRose explained, "All he did was walk everywhere. He didn't drive. He never had a drivers' license. And people knew him, so they would pick him up and give him rides." On these long walks, he took photos constantly, of everything he saw, any-

were of landscapes, animals, and trees, where people almost seem incidental to the shot. Photos of barns, farms, and stone walls show the rural parts of town, while the photos of downtown streets capture a changing city over time, as new big box stores come in and clunky older cars go out of fashion. The photos have an ethereal quality and an intimacy. They capture small details and moments only someone looking closely would see, like a woman gazing down at a squirrel she's feeding on her porch, or a red and black car parked perfectly centered in front of a restaurant with the same color scheme.

Peterson, after graduating from high school, enrolled at URI and began taking photographs, while becoming increasingly interested in what Mars was trying to say with his lens. One day, he approached Mars: "He was cleaning the floor, and I asked him, 'Why do you do it?'" Mars replied: "I just like cameras." Peterson was unsatisfied with that response and followed up: "No, you shoot every single day, you shoot at every single thing you see with that camera, you can't just like cameras." Peterson never saw Mars' developed photos; after Mars developed the prints and meticulously placed them in albums, they sat in his house. Peterson remained curious: "I just knew that he shot enough that there had to be crazy beautiful stuff."

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When Peterson heard that Mars had passed away in 2011, at age 71, he wondered what would happen to the photographs that he had thought about for so many years. He waited



thing that interested him. He wasn't particularly interested in learning new techniques, or saving money for a nicer camera. Instead, he made rounds of southern Rhode Island day after day, capturing thousands upon thousands of images of life.

In one black and white photo taken on Kenyon Avenue, a blurry young couple walks down the sidewalk, hands around each other's waists. In another, a group of people sit watching the waves on cement blocks overlooking Narragansett Beach (above). He captured his own daily life: his close friends and family, the chickens he raised in his backyard. Many of his photos

MARS cont.

for several months out of respect for the family before finding Ken's cousin, Diana Mars, who had been handling his things. Peterson recalled that she said, in effect, "there were too many to keep track of." The photos were still in their leather albums, with several 3.5"x3.5" or 3.5"x5" images glued to each page. Peterson brought them to a warehouse space, hoping to write a book about them. In going through the albums, he even found a photo of himself, at age 5, eating tuna salad on his family's porch.

Ultimately, Peterson was still stymied about what Mars had been thinking. He went to interview Mars' mother Lucille about her son's work. But because of her failing mental acuity, "over the course of talking to her, she kept realizing he was gone," Peterson described. "I realized I was watching her relive his death over and over again." The photos stayed safe in the warehouse, and Peterson moved onto other projects before eventually donating the pictures to the South County History Center in 2017.

"I never even thought of somebody who might be interested in such a thing," Diana Mars told a local newspaper, *The Independent*, in August 2017. The family saw his work as integral to his character, and a way of documenting his community and surroundings. "Sometimes you make contributions to the world without even knowing it. And he did that," LaRose said. "He was such a kind, quiet person. People like that often get forgotten, and you think they're not making a contribution. But here he's made an amazing one to the community. So I think we're proud of that."

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Mars' albums, after traveling through multiple hands and multiple homes, now live at the South County History Center. Hilary Gunnels, the collections manager, is the person who actually handles Mars' photos every day. In June 2020, the center received a \$30,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (as part of the \$40 million that the NEH distributed through the COVID-19 relief act) to archive Mars' photos.

Each album is being painstakingly documented—digital copies are made of each page's layout—as the center creates cleaned, searchable scans of each photo. Once the staff finishes the digitization and documentation process, the next step will be a massive crowdsourcing campaign to identify people, places, and timeframes for each image. Essentially, people will be recreating all of the local knowledge and relationships that Mars had built on his daily walks. As the center has posted some of Mars' images on their Facebook page, people respond with fond memories of him from URI. "One hell of a nice guy," Tom Carmody, an archaeologist, wrote. "Not only was Mr Mars an excellent photographer providing an excellent legacy, but he was a decent and kind man," Dorothy Leduc added. Other commenters from the area simply identify locations, stores, or familiar cars, which have since vanished. Gunnels observed that Mars' collection is important for his depth and breadth of understanding of his environment and community. "We recognize that the ways of knowing and creating knowledge about a place come from everyday normal people," she explained. The center, she added, is devoted to preserving Mars' legacy as part of

a larger effort to document "people who aren't the old white powerful families" of Rhode Island. Mars' lens has altered her own daily perceptions. "It's kind of weird, I'll leave work and drive down a road that he walked down, and I can see the world, and it looks like one of the photographs," she said. "Depending on the quality of the print, they've got this yellow or purple tone. And after a day of processing them, it gets saturated into my vision." She added, "I see the world around me like his photographs."

LaRose, whose museum job focuses on the preservation and promotion of Indigenous culture and history, says Mars' work falls into a lineage of artwork that defies categorization or confinement to traditional forms. "It's Indigenous art because an Indigenous person made it," she explained. "He created a whole anthology across his life of just taking photos of a simple place." LaRose wants to support and promote the new younger generation of Narragansett photographers—including artists like India Reels or Lynsea Montanari. The museum has shown their work, in addition to Mars' photos. The young people's prints will not sit untouched in a basement. •



Undated photo of Mars (right) at URI; one of the few known photos of him (from SCHC 2018 newsletter)

ETCETERA

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Book & Movie Recommendations

- *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, Richard Rothstein
- *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, and Schooling in San Francisco*, Savannah Sange
- *The BLDGBLOG Book*, Geoff Manaugh
- *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World*, Andrea Wulf
- *The Idealist: Wendell Willkie's Wartime Quest to Build One World*, Professor Zipp
- *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2012), Chad Freidrichs - Find it at pruit-igoe.com
- *Detropia* (2013), Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady - Find it on PBS Independent Lens
- *Do the Right Thing* (1989), Spike Lee