

**Brown University**

# **Urban Studies Newsletter**

**2008-2009**

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*In Urbe Speramus*

# Introduction

Welcome to the Urban Studies newsletter! Although the past year has not been particularly kind to the world's wealth, it has undeniably provided us with a wealth of Urban Studies questions: In the wake of the present foreclosure crisis, does the ideal of universal homeownership still make any sense? In a car- and plane-centric world, is long-distance rail travel really appropriate for the United States? With a president who has established an Office of Urban Affairs and promised to set up a national Infrastructure Bank, all signs point to Urban Studies theories finding their way into practice more often than not.

At Brown, this year has seen Professor Patrick Malone become the program's new Director. We'd further like to offer a warm welcome to Heather Parker, the new program coordinator and effective new face of Urban Studies to the concentrators. Outside 29 Manning Walk, Professor James Morone has assumed chairmanship of the Political Science Department, and Professor Marion Orr has been selected to head the Taubman Center for Public Policy and American Institutions. In November, members of the program helped to host the Better World by Design conference, which brought together designers, entrepreneurs, engineers, and others interested in improving human life through technology. While attending the many other lectures and events Brown has to offer, members of the program can now show their pride with new Urban Studies t-shirts designed by DUG leader Amy Kendall '10.

The program is proud to showcase two Honors theses this year. First, Alex Werth details the desires which motivate and the politics which maintain the preservation movement in Providence. Second, Philip Burns investigates the effects of gentrification on neighborhoods' pre-existing residents. This edition of the newsletter also profiles two of the program's professors, Kenneth Wong and Tamar Katz. Wong applies the lens of political science to the world of education, and Katz explores the city through literature.

Thanks go out all around, but particularly to Professor Malone and Heather Parker. We'd also like to extend our thanks to Professors Katz and Wong for sitting down with us, and to all the students who've contributed work. Best wishes and good luck to all.

Daniel Feinglos, Class of 2009



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# Fall 2009 Course Listing

Course ID	Description
<b>1. Introduction</b>	
URBN0210	The City: An Introduction to Urban America
<b>2. Research Skills</b>	
EDUC1110	Introductory Statistics for Education Research
SOC1100	Intro Statistics for Social Research
<b>3a. Basic Curriculum (Core)</b>	
AMCV 1520	Tech. & Material Culture: the Urban Built Environment
ECON 1410	Urban Economics
HIAA 0900	Film Architecture
HIST 1830	American Urban History since 1870
<b>3b. Basic Curriculum (Seminars)</b>	
HIAA 1910A	Architecture of Downtown Providence
URBN 1010	Fieldwork in Urban Archaeology and Historical Preservation
URBN 1870M	Urban Regimes in the American Republic
URBN 1870N	The Cultural & Social Life of Built Environment
<b>4. Complementary Curriculum</b>	
ARCH 1200F	City and the Festival
ARCH 1900	The Archaeology of College Hill
EDUC 2330	Urban Politics and School Governance
ENGL 1710I	Harlem Renaissance
ENGN 1930S	Land Use and Built Environment
ENVS 1700A	Cultural Competence and Ethics
GEOL 1320	Introduction to GIS
GRMN 1660B	Berlin: A City Strives to Reinvent Itself
HIAA 0550	Florence & Tuscany
HIAA 1560C	Italian Visual Culture: Venice and the Veneto
HIST 1670	History of Brazil
PPAI 1700R	Urban Revitalization: Lessons from the Providence Plan
SOC 2960C	Urban Sociology

Remember, this list is subject to change. Check Banner for updates as the Fall semester approaches.

# Honors Theses

On January 17, 2008, hundreds of guests filed into the Columbus Theater on Federal Hill for the Providence Preservation Society's 50<sup>th</sup> annual public meeting and awards ceremony. PPS began with a jolt in the late 1950s when federally sponsored urban renewal was in crisis. While *tabula rasa* redevelopment schemes composed in concrete and glass were meant to stabilize property values in the nation's aging central cities, projects like Providence's Cathedral Square often did little but uproot low-income communities, only further fueling the outward exodus of people and industries. It was a political and demographic nightmare. Responding to one such act of slash-and-burn planning—Brown University's demolition of over 60 historic houses on College Hill for the construction of Wriston and Keeney Quads—PPS catapulted itself into the nexus of Providence's neighborhood politics with a radical proposition. Why not "redevelop" a prominent slum—Benefit Street—by finding middle-class investors to restore the corridor's collection of historic houses? By harnessing an emerging bourgeois taste for historic architecture, preservation had the potential to accomplish the goals of urban renewal through less violent means, both physically and politically. PPS' scheme proved a resounding success. The Benefit Street model helped change American preservation from an anti-market phenomenon to a force for economic development. Now, a half-century later, PPS reflected back on a year of incredible highs and lows, and looked forward to

**Alex Werth**, Politics and the Providence Preservation Movement  
**Professor Patrick Malone**, Thesis Director  
**Professor John Logan**, Reader

an uncertain future.

During 2007, four of the buildings listed on the Society's 10 Most Endangered Properties List had disappeared, or were slated to. Just three days earlier, demolition had begun on the Fruit and Produce Warehouse under suspicious circumstances. Lacking alternative legal recourse, PPS activists had jumped on the building's 800-foot-long loading dock as backhoes circled around to begin tearing at the Deco detailing. Then, on the day before the awards ceremony, Governor Donald Carcieri announced major cuts to the Rhode Island Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit, a statewide policy that had spurred almost \$2 billion in historic reinvestment since 2002. Outgoing PPS President Mark Van Noppen bemoaned the loss, calling the evaporating credit: "The most important economic development program that Rhode Island has had in some time."<sup>1</sup> He seemed eager to refocus the crowd on some of the organization's notable successes. The previous year had seen unprecedented rises in membership and financing, as well as the long-awaited conversion of the Masonic Temple—a monumental Neo-Classical shell left abandoned for 80 years—into the Providence Renaissance Hotel, a gem of the city's tourist economy. What did these contradictory events mean for the state of preservation in Providence? Were the powerful political alliances forged between PPS and the public and private actors who make urban development happen in jeopardy?

In my thesis, I explore the

role that historic preservation has played in the last two decades of Providence's downtown development, focusing on the manner in which preservationists have formed and institutionalized political alliances with local growth actors. I analyze the mechanisms and maneuvers of these unlikely development partners through three case studies, all of which collided at the PPS annual meeting: the rise and fall of the state historic tax credit, the redevelopment of the Masonic Temple, and the demolition of the Fruit and Produce Warehouse. Is there a growth machine in Providence, and if so, are preservationists involved? Are they *leading* it? The overwhelming investment leveraged by the tax credit soundly proved the economic value of preservation. Then what led to the credit's demise? If preservation is so valuable—it is consistently heralded in local economic development literature, including the City's Comprehensive Plan, as integral to Providence's long-term growth—then why do prominent buildings like the Produce Warehouse get knocked down? Do these breakdowns in the development regime imply a fracture in a once-secure coalition? Not quite. They reflect a systematic arrangement that puts the Mayor and his Department of Planning and Development in a position of ultimate control, discretionarily appropriating and enforcing the rhetoric and methods of historic preservation in order to advance the executive agenda. The real question is: why do preservationists continue to play along?

**Philip Burns**, Can Gentrification Be Good for the Poor? The Experience of Boston's South End and South Boston Neighborhoods

**Professors Patrick Malone and Samuel Zipp**, Thesis Co-Directors

**Professor Nathaniel Baum-Snow**, Reader

One of the great lessons of an education in Urban Studies at Brown is that poverty and opportunity are structured by spatial inequality. The lives of all, but especially those of disadvantaged people, are heavily determined by where one lives; neighborhood helps to determine wealth in the form of real estate, educational and job opportunities, social structure, and group identity. Over the last fifty years, this has been bad news for inner-city residents, who have dealt with suburban flight and increased urban joblessness. According to William Julius Wilson, these trends have created the concentrations of poverty responsible for the increased crime, worsening schools and fewer jobs in their neighborhoods.

Viewed against this dominant pattern of the American metropolis, the arrival of new middle- and upper-income residents appears to be the answer to the inner city's prayers. Low-income urban areas have been suffering under the weights of disinvestment, suburban competition, a lack of human capital and political marginalization due to residential segregation by class and race. A neighborhood undergoing gentrification, defined as the transformation of a lower-class neighborhood into a middle- or upper-class one, is characterized by a class-heterogeneous population. In the midst of this process segregation declines and concentrations of poverty dissolve, in theory generating jobs, improving schools and reducing crime.

Why, then, has gentrification caused such fierce resistance

among lower- and working-class communities in cities such as New York, Boston and Chicago? The primary reason is displacement; when rents or property taxes rise, some residents are not able to stay. Though people may move out of gentrifying neighborhoods at a rate no faster than other neighborhoods, they are more often forced to do so against their will.

However, even longtime residents who are able to remain in gentrifying neighborhoods protest these changes. They complain that "yuppies" (young urban professionals) are "taking over" or "sucking them dry." My study of two Boston neighborhoods: South Boston, which contained the poorest majority-white census tract in America outside West Virginia in 1990, and the South End, a diverse formerly lower-class neighborhood of people of color, shows that in general, the promised benefits of deconcentrating poverty have not materialized. To be sure, some things are better in the two neighborhoods today than they were before this process had begun. Streets are safer, blight has been reduced, jobs in the leisure and hospitality industry have been created, and some schools show signs of improvement. But the vast majority of schools remain segregated and low-performing due to upper- and middle-class parents' decisions to leave the city once their children reach school age. Public and subsidized housing projects remain dangerous. And the two populations, old and new, poor and affluent, with children and without, rarely come into contact.

Gentrification, however, is a process which Americans must learn to live with. The proliferation of knowledge-based and creative industries, high energy costs, the postponement of marriage and childbirth, and "smart growth"-focused planning will drive upper- and middle-class settlement of the cities for the foreseeable future. Gentrification can combat negative social outcomes only when it is a truly integrative project. Neighborhood institutions need to reflect the diversity of the residents around them. Most important among these are the schools, which highlight the crucial role of middle-class families with children in ameliorating negative social outcomes and lending economic and cultural capital to the political demands of low-income neighborhoods. Then, finally, instead of cities boasting to outsiders of their "up-and-coming neighborhoods," the poor themselves may be able to say, "My life is up and coming, thanks to my neighborhood."



# Professor Profiles: Tamar Katz

*With all the different professors and subjects within Urban Studies, it can be easy to get lost. From architecture to education to political science, there's practically no end to all the different things you can take and still keep things under the Urban Studies umbrella. In this section, we'll try to let you know a little bit more about that professor whose class you really want to shop next semester, or maybe bring you back to that professor whose class you remember from way back when.*

What makes Urban Studies “the quintessential interdisciplinary program,” as the department’s website suggests? Its topics and courses, from “Contemporary Architecture” to “Housing and Homelessness,” are certainly interdisciplinary, but an equally important and perhaps less recognized interdisciplinary component is its faculty. No faculty member belongs solely to the Urban Studies department, thus creating a roster of professors with diverse interests and richly developed bodies of knowledge outside of “the city.” An interdisciplinary subject benefits from interdisciplinary professors who can apply their expertise in an area, be it in political science or literature, to the city. Professor Tamar Katz, an English professor who enjoys a courtesy appointment in Urban Studies and regularly teaches courses in the program, is one such dually-interested asset of the Urban Studies Program.

Professor Katz joined Brown’s English Department in 1992 after receiving a B.A. in English from Yale and a Ph.D. in English from Cornell. Katz chose Brown because it was “the best job I could imagine having.” Just what made Brown so attractive? The reputation of its undergraduates, Katz says. With Brown undergraduates professors can have conversations where they learn as much from their students as they teach. Cross-listed courses, Katz believes, attract students with diverse backgrounds and knowledge and generate stimulating, mutually-beneficial conversations. The courses that she has taught across the English and Urban Studies disciplines have affirmed her expectations of the quality of Brown students.

Professor Katz’s research on Modern literature—“the weirder the better”—further highlights her interdisciplinary approach to academics. Katz is fascinated by complex, sometimes dark, portrayals of the city, such as Caleb Carr’s *The Alienist*, Kevin Baker’s *Dreamland*, and Colson Whitehead’s *The Colossus of New York*. Particularly interested in “Old New York,” Katz emphasizes that “looking back” is more complicated than pure nostalgia. She and others look back in order to explore “concrete forms of conflicts,” from protests to the class conflicts of inner-city slums. In 2001, Katz published *Impressionist Subjects; Gender, Interiority, and Modernist Fiction in England*. She is currently working on a book about modernism’s use of the city and contemporary urban nostalgia.

This spring, Katz introduced “Reading New York,” an urban studies seminar, which exemplifies her dedication to integrating separate traditions within her courses. For “Reading New York,” Katz has chosen a diverse mix of authors including Ann Petry, E.B. White, Jane Jacobs, and Rem Koolhaas in order to balance the quintessentially urban, cosmopolitan New York with a community-based view. She is also teaching “The Roaring Twenties,” a first year seminar. Next year, Professor Katz looks forward to teaching “City Novels,” a course she has taught in previous years but will rework in order to incorporate a broader range of international novels.



-Katherine Hermann '09

# Professor Profiles: Kenneth Wong

Professor Kenneth Wong, like Professor Katz, has a courtesy appointment in the Urban Studies Program. He is also the chair of the Education Department and is involved in both the Public Policy Program and the Political Science Department.

Professor Wong's interest in Urban Studies began early. As far back as his youth in Hong Kong, he took great pleasure in reading news headlines about civic affairs—not party politics, but the seemingly mundane workings of government. Wong's practical involvement in the world of Urban Studies began during his time as a graduate student at the University of Chicago. As he conducted his research for his mentor Paul Peterson, he found himself applying unconventional models to the world of cities, such as the Realist model of International Relations. Unlike typical Urban Studies approaches, Realism suggests that all cities are fundamentally similar, compete with each other for limited resources like investment, raw materials, and support from the central government. "You don't necessarily need to look inside a city to figure out how it acts," Wong asserts.



Finishing his PhD at the University of Chicago in 1983, he would go on to teach Political Science at the University of Oregon for five years, before returning to his alma mater. There, Wong eventually assumed his mentor's old role as a Professor of Education. After a four-year stint at Vanderbilt, Wong came to Brown in 2005.

Despite his many postings, Wong's policy interests have been consistently focused on education for the last 15 years. In his latest book, *The Education Mayor*, Wong describes the convergence between the political process and the world of education. For example, many present-day mayors appoint their cities' school boards—a phenomenon entirely unprecedented in either educational or political history. Wong wrote the book because he felt that modern circumstances demanded the application of political science thinking

to the field of education.

Wong helps to guide students through this sort of investigation in his class EDUC 1650, Policy Implementation in Education. The class addresses education policies like the Bush-era No Child Left Behind program, which Wong describes as the one dominant accountability framework which applies to all schools. "Everybody's very interested in it," Wong says, "because schools that don't meet the program's standards get restructured." As with so much else, Providence offers a "natural urban laboratory" for these studies. In general, the class assigns teams of 3 or 4 to find a restructuring project, write a brief report on it, and share the findings with stakeholders outside Brown.

With Wong's city-focused training, Brown's Urban Studies program seemed a natural and necessary component of his academic life. Fundamentally, Wong suggests that his interest in things urban stems from the urban world's complexity. "You can't just use a single lens to analyze education and transportation at the same time—you need more than one, so you can compensate for what you don't normally think about."

When it comes to the future of Urban Studies at Brown, Wong hopes for broader collaboration between the program's different elements. For example, education professionals' questions about the ideal physical environment for 21st-century learning seem to dovetail perfectly with architects' ideas about the very same thing. Re-thinking the traditional concept of the classroom, and getting away from the age-old model of compartmentalized rooms is just the sort of challenge that Urban Studies was made to embrace.

Furthermore, Wong hopes to capitalize on the continuing expansion of Brown's international profile. With Brown entering into relationships with schools in Barcelona and Hong Kong, Wong hopes that we can follow up on that process, directing Urban Studies towards the studies of international urban interactions and global megacities. Wong himself has expressed an interest in embracing the global perspective from the other side, going back to his hometown of Hong Kong to lecture on what he's discovered in his decades abroad.

-Daniel Feinglos '09

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## Apparel



Show your Urban Studies pride with our new t-shirts! Designed by Urban Studies' very own Amy Kendall '10, this shirt will immediately become the centerpiece of your wardrobe. Wear it to class, to the planning department, to City Hall, or just around the house. 100% cotton, 100% Urban Studies. Available in S, M, L, and XL with a \$10 donation to the Urban Studies program. Send your orders to Urban Studies, Brown University, Box 1833, Providence, RI 02912. Please make checks payable to "Brown University." Support the Urban Studies program and dress like the best!



Dan Lurie '11