



Photo by Ella Comberg

## Students Partner with Local Non-profits in Housing Justice Course

By Ella Comberg

Professor MariJoan Bull’s fall seminar, “Housing Justice,” brought together students from various disciplines to work with community organizations on housing issues in Rhode Island. Students worked in teams, each paired with a local nonprofit—including the Rhode Island Center for Justice, South Coast Fair Housing, and Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE)—to gather and analyze data that the community groups could use in pursuit of legislative reform. “Numbers are important for backing a legislative agenda,” said Professor Bull. “The students found things that organizations already knew, but didn’t have the time or resources to crunch the numbers. Now, they can testify with qualitative support and say ‘this is why we need this.’” Bull said the course operated with the Swearer Center’s vision for community-driven student research in mind. Students “worked with groups to find out what kind of research would be helpful to their mission.” Below, you’ll find descriptions of the four student projects that emerged from the course, and some of their key findings.

1. In partnership with the **Center for Justice**, one group’s work centered on the question, “How can we improve quality of housing that tenants have in Providence?” The project is modeled on landlord registry programs that exist in

other communities throughout the country, which seek to hold landlords accountable for keeping property up to code. “Similar to running another kind of business, like a restaurant, you have to have a license and meet health and safety standards. We’re not quite as stringent when it comes to housing,” said Bull. “This type of approach sees your physical wellbeing as directly tied to housing. People are often paying too much or having difficulty finding something affordable, so they’ll settle for something that does not meet health and safety standards. The landlord is selling a product that doesn’t meet standards, but there is not, like with a restaurant, a regular inspection.” The method students and the Center for Justice propose would instate inspection on a regular cycle. By looking at code violation system that’s in place now, students worked to come up with recommendation for city. “By looking at evictions and code violations in terms of what the housing stock looks like, the goals of that group were to see what percent of housing that was in eviction process also had a code violation,” said Bull.

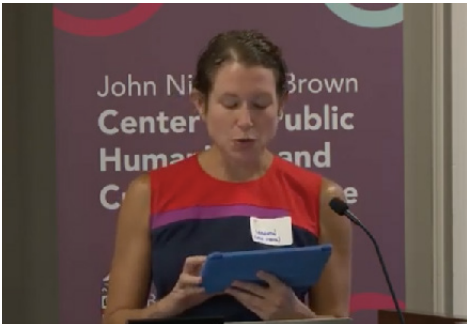
2. In partnership with **DARE** and the **Center for Justice**, another group worked on research about legal representation in eviction

filings. “Our data shows clearly that landlords come with counsel and tenants do not,” said Bull, citing the 100% of landlords in Rhode Island who bring counsel, compared to only 7% of tenants, a statistic which students in the course produced through data analysis. Bull was clear that eviction filings have declined in other states, like New York, when tenants have right to counsel. “Students put a lot of time into qualitative aspects,” talking to the most popular lawyers who represent landlords, said Bull, along with a judge who works on eviction cases. “All of those support tenants having right to counsel.” Also as part of DARE’s anti-eviction agenda, student worked on initiatives to reform the way landlords use court records as a screening device against tenants. “People’s names comes up on the online court database even if you were found not guilty,” said Bull, and it’s hard to find the nature of the decision. “DARE is working to get false positives to not show up to protect against landlord discrimination.”

3. Another group worked  
» HOUSING continued, PG. 7

### SNEAK PEAK

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



### Radical Cartography

URBAN MEDIA scholar Shannon Mattern speaks at Public Humanities conference

» continued, PG. 4



### Dispatches from Rome

SENIOR CAYLA Caplan reflects on a semester in Rome where she studied in Cornell’s Urban Planning program

» continued, PG. 5



### Stefano Bloch’s New Memoir

READ FROM former Brown Prof. and Urban Studies Post-Doctoral Fellow Stefano Bloch’s memoir *Going All City*

» continued, PG. 5

### CONTENTS

SCHOOLS REPORT .....	2	CARILLO ‘20 .....	6
KIRBY ‘20 .....	3	SHATZKIN ‘20 .....	7
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR .....	3	CONTINUED .....	7
RADICAL CARTOGRAPHY .....	4	ETCETERA .....	8
BLOCH .....	5	CROSSWORD .....	8
CAPLAN ‘20 .....	5		



# FEATURES



Photo from Wikimedia Commons

## Report Draws Attention to Prov. Schools

In late June, the Providence Public School District was rocked by a devastating report that implicated everyone from teachers to governmental officials in the alarming state of the city's public schools. Released by Johns Hopkins University, the report not only revealed startling realities of the Providence Public School District, but also quickly became a touchpoint for an urgent statewide conversation about who is, and who should be, responsible for the city's public schooling. The report details the state of school facilities—including crumbling buildings, discolored tap water, and the smell of stale urine—as well as the phenomenon of teacher absenteeism, widespread physical violence, and a culture of low expectations. These disturbing descriptions provide context for an educational environment where, across grade levels, only 14 percent of students are proficient in English and only 10 percent are proficient in math.

The report, however, provided little in the way of recommendations, leaving wide open the questions of who should take the much-needed remedial steps and how they should take them. Should the city or state government have control over the school system? And how should this authority be transferred? The report's findings seemed to invite the possibility of a state takeover, a course of action quickly proposed and subsequently approved, which ultimately transferred responsibility for the Providence Public School District (PPSD) from city to state government in early September. State takeovers, however, have often failed to improve educational outcomes and historically disempowered majority Black and Latinx communities. The strong local and national reactions to this report—seemingly universal shock and alarm—belie how unsurprising these educational realities are for the teachers, students, and activists who work and study in Providence Public Schools. For Chanda Womack, the Founding Executive Director of Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE), the report is a prime example of the ways that city government continues to dismiss student voices. “We have been telling the city that this is an issue,” Womack told us in an exclusive interview. “Young people have been saying this. But you needed an academic stance to validate that yes, there is a problem.” The report—which cost \$50,000—was paid for by the Partnership for Rhode Island, a nonprofit made up of the CEOs of major Rhode Island employers like Hasbro Inc., CVS Health, and

Brown University. As Womack emphasized to us, “We didn’t need a report to affirm what we’ve been saying and experiencing.”

Yet the report, unlike past community feedback, has spurred the government into action. Early in August, Commissioner of Education Angélica Infante-Green submitted a proposal to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education asking for a complete state takeover of the city's schools. Formerly the Deputy Commissioner of Education in New York, Infante-Green was appointed Rhode Island's Commissioner in late March, making her the first Latina and first woman of color to hold the position. After her request was granted, Infante-Green assumed all the powers of the mayor, school board, and city council in an effort to prepare school facilities for the upcoming school year. She also appointed an interim superintendent, Frances Gallo, the former Central Falls superintendent.

The city's decision to cede power to the state government ostensibly resulted from a series of eight community forums that took place in the emotional weeks after the report's release. Located in public schools around the city, these forums were a joint collaboration between the mayor's office and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). Normally sparsely attended, they drew the attendance of hundreds of Providence residents, many of whom voiced a strong desire to see the state assume control of the city's public school district.

Following the forums, RIDE released a 71-page proposal for the state takeover, outlining the major difficulties identified in the report and formally articulating the department's plan. The proposal, which went into effect on November 1st, shifts the power structure of the school system: in addition to appointing a new superintendent, the proposal grants Commissioner Infante-Green control of “the budget, program, and personnel of PPSP and its schools.” Infante-Green immediately received substantial national positive press for her seemingly bold state action, including a feature in the *Wall Street Journal* that lauded her for coming to Rhode Island to “make change.”

The bureaucratic efficiency promised by a state takeover is certainly appealing. Many parents are frustrated by a school system mired in disputes between parties—including the city government, state government, and the teachers' union—who share authority and responsibility for the city's schools. With decision-making power collected under one superintendent and one education commissioner, there may

be less room for complacency, as the PPSP, the teachers' union, RIDE, the city council, and the mayor's office will no longer be able to blame each other for the school's failings.

State takeovers of public school districts have historical precedent. In Rhode Island, the state's authority to take control of Providence schools comes from the Crowley Act, which allows the state to intervene in failing public schools if those schools have not shown improvement after a period of three years, although it does not clearly outline the process for taking over entire districts.

But if the history of state takeovers across the country is any indication, these transfers of power are rarely smooth, and they often exacerbate racial inequality. In his book *Takeover: Race, Education, and American Democracy*, Domingo Morel, a political science professor at Rutgers University and a member of the Johns Hopkins review team, argues that state takeovers typically obscure their own political and racist motivations. Although state governments' outward facing statements may reflect intentions to improve school performance, Morel believes that school takeovers are ultimately a political tool to take power away from communities of color. In a review of 1,000 school districts, Morel found that majority-Black districts are more likely to be taken over than majority-white districts. Additionally, state takeovers are more likely in districts with rising Black political empowerment, especially those with increasing numbers of Black elected officials. In practice, school takeovers often mean large and indiscriminate firings of teachers and principals, and fewer people of color representing their own communities on school boards.

With takeovers, Morel argues that government officials often want greater control over the distribution of state resources at the expense of communities of color: “Across the country, you have rural and suburban state legislators essentially resenting that these resources—that they perceive as their own—are going to districts like Providence,” Morel told us.

However, the history of state takeovers is not monolithic. In his book, Morel cites the Rhode Island state takeover of Central Falls public schools in 1991, after a decade of fiscal and academic challenges. Although Central Falls public schools were 40 percent Latinx by 1990, the local school board was entirely white, which alienated community members from their schools. After the takeover, the state

» SCHOOLS continued, PG. 7



# FEATURES

## Students, activists advocate for utility justice

By Lillian Kirby

*Lily Kirby is a senior in Urban Studies who has been working as a student organizer at the George Wiley Center in Pawtucket this semester. Read her statement below on the activist group's push against shutoffs in Rhode Island.*

How is your life affected by your access to affordable, consistent utility service – or your lack of it? Every year in Rhode Island, thousands of households go through the trauma of utility termination due to unaffordable bills. When you're shut off, food preparation becomes difficult, and large amounts of food can go bad, as well as refrigerated medicines. People can't see in the dark, students can't study, access to information is interrupted, and children's lives can be particularly disrupted. Folks can't operate wheelchairs, or other medical equipment, nor communication services. In times of heat or cold, lack of utility service can lead to medical complications, sickness, and death. Utility service is a basic need of modern life, and everyone deserves reliable access. It is an injustice to terminate the service of those who can't pay unaffordable bills.

The George Wiley Center is a grassroots group based in Pawtucket, RI, that organizes for social and economic justice statewide, specifically advocating for systematic changes aimed at alleviating problems associated with poverty. For decades, it has focused its organizing efforts on utilities, negotiating with the state's institutions like the Public Utilities Commission, as well as the energy provider National Grid, to expand people's energy rights, and spread knowledge of those rights.

The Wiley Center has won many victories in the past, including an Arrearage Management Program which offers debt-forgiveness up to \$1,500 a year, and the establishment

of Protected Statuses that ensure the most vulnerable populations, like households with children under 2 or people with medical conditions, can't have service terminated. Most recently, on October 14th, the Wiley Center won an emergency regulation to restore people's service at a 10 percent rate of outstanding bills, hoping to get as many people turned back on as possible as the weather starts to get colder.

Currently, the Center is campaigning for a more ambitious restructuring of the utility payment model with a Percentage Income Payment Plan, or PIPP. A PIPP would institute a progressive rate based on income,

as opposed to a rate based on usage, for low-income people, who would only pay 2-4 percent of their monthly income on utility service. PIPPs currently operate successfully in several states including New Jersey and Ohio; in fact, Rhode Island had a PIPP in the late eighties that substantially lowered cost burden of those who used it, before it was phased out due to lack of funding. A PIPP would drastically decrease debt and termination, as well as mitigate accompanying stress and trauma.

The Center has submitted PIPP to the legislature for two years without passage, and we're hopeful that 2020 will be the year that finally

bears fruit. We're building public support through an online petition: [tinyurl.com/pipprhodeisland](https://tinyurl.com/pipprhodeisland). Please sign on and share the petition widely; if you're interested in getting more involved with efforts for energy justice and anti-poverty organizing, utility rights meetings are held every Wednesday at 32 East Main Street, Pawtucket, RI, 02860. You can also visit [www.georgewileycenter.org](http://www.georgewileycenter.org) for more information. ■



Photo from George Wiley Center

## From the Editor

I'm excited to present this semester's Urban Studies Newsletter as a way to celebrate the work of students and professors in what's certainly one of the most close-knit, community-oriented departments at Brown. I've always been immensely grateful, especially in my first few semesters, for the commitment to social justice, equity, and thoughtful but never *too*-heady discourse that we've all experienced in Urban Studies. I hope the combination of local news and university happenings in this publication can reflect the department's similar dual commitment to real world politics and academic research. Stay tuned in the spring for the next Urban Studies Newsletter and the much-anticipated Urban Journal featuring student work from across the university on urbanism in all its forms!



-Ella Comberg '20

*The Urban Studies Newsletter is a publication of the Brown University Urban Studies Program. Special thanks to Dietrich Neumann and Meredith Paine for their guidance, supervision, and editing; to Lance Gloss and Colin Kent-Daggett for their previous work as editors and mentors; and to Cayla Kaplan, Natasha Shatzkin, Rose Carillo, Lily Kirby, Miles Guggenheim, Alina Kulman, and Sara Van Horn, for their participation despite the repeated nagging of the editorial staff.*



# NEWS FROM CAMPUS

## Radical Cartography conference brings speakers to U.

By Ella Comberg



Photo by Ella Comberg

The Public Humanities graduate program at Brown organized Radical Cartography Now, a conference held at Brown on September 28th. The interdisciplinary conference welcomed scholars of geography and mapping, planners, local community leaders, and academics from a number of other disciplines who, together, considered questions of equity in mapping, artistic interpretations of physical space, and the politics of corporate digital mapping. Dr. Shannon Mattern focused on the last question in her keynote address, titled “Mapwashing,” which examined the co-optation of analog civic planning tools, like post-its and printed maps that you can draw on, by Sidewalk Labs, the urban development arm of Alphabet, Google’s parent company. While questions remain about the efficacy of these tools to impact public projects, Mattern pointed to the trend as particularly problematic when operating in service of largely overdetermined real estate projects, like the Smart City neighborhood Sidewalk Lab is planning for Toronto’s Quayside neighborhood. Mattern set up a contrast between Sidewalk Labs’ original offices in New York’s Hudson Yards district, where, said Mattern, “lack of public process allowed for unchecked development.” That development was, formally, the opposite of what Sidewalk Labs attempts to show in Toronto: public engagement. “Despite closed door deals, Alphabet uses low-fi/DIY aesthetic” in Toronto, she said, where the Sidewalk Labs office begs visitors, “add your own voice!” Mattern described Sidewalk’s

experimental workspace in Toronto, called 307, like this:

“A set of rolling, modular, playful, interactive tools that turn 307 into a place for input plus experimentation plus new ideas plus action. The workspace is itself an inhabitable model, a platform for Sidewalk team members to observe behavior, conduct informal interviews, and focus groups, pilot test new urban features, collect data, and iterate inside the building’s walls and eventually, implement in the docklands outside. 307’s humble material objects—concrete and chipboard, post its and foam blocks—are rhetorical tools suggesting that here, cities are workshopped, urban futures and data plans are co-created from a mix of open platforms and public knowledge. 307, we might say, is a participatory map writ large.”

If this turn towards civic engagement registers as positive given the history of real estate and urban planning efforts that disregard the preferences of citizens in favor of capital accumulation, Mattern maintained that Sidewalk Labs’ use of particular tools marks no significant deviation from the ideals that have informed corporate development in the past. The real shift comes as corporations like Alphabet not only work as contractors for planning departments, but actually become the planners themselves, a change that involves the introduction of data gathering tools into the public realm. Mattern described playground equipment, storm drains, park benches, and library books covered in sensors in Sidewalk’s vision of a smart city in Toronto, which would feed data back

to a central hub to inform repairs and planning. This data, rather than the more humanist input of citizens, drives planning and development in Sidewalk’s model in Toronto. To posit, as Sidewalk’s aesthetics do, that any other information drives their urban model would be disingenuous. Of course, Toronto is just a model, whose functionality will trickle down to other cities. Indeed, that city is not an anomalous site of innovation; other cities have taken on similar models, like Boston’s Beta-Blocks project, which allows city

governments to work at the speed and with the efficiency of tech corporations to implement smart city planning and technology.

For me, Mattern’s gave words to the problems of techno-utopianism, specifically, the increasingly blurred line between tech corporations and urban planners. It’s easy for the language of innovation and the aesthetic of grassroots planning to cloud the profit-driven nature of Sidewalk’s work in Toronto which, we have seen, will have far-reaching effects if its work remains unchecked. ■

“307’s humble material objects—concrete and chipboard, post its and foam blocks—are rhetorical tools suggesting that here, cities are workshopped, urban futures and data plans are co-created from a mix of open platforms and public knowledge.”

-Shannon Mattern



# IN THE DEPARTMENT

## Former Post-doc Bloch Publishes Popular Memoir

Excerpt from *Going All City* by Stefano Bloch

*Stefano Bloch, former Post-doctoral Fellow in Brown's Urban Studies department, was recently appointed Assistant Professor at the University of Arizona. His first book—which he worked on while at Brown—came out in late November from the University of Chicago Press. Read an excerpt below from Bloch's *Going All City: Struggle and Survival in LA's Graffiti Subculture*.*

My mother would leave me in her car, parked in front yards, in apartment complex lots, in alleys. I would sit for hours waiting for her to come back. She would tell me to stay out of sight, so I would lie down on the backseats or sit in the footwells or pull down the seats and lie in the trunk. When my brothers and, later, my sister were in the car with me, my mom would scare us by saying that if the police saw us, they would take her to jail, and we would have to live in a foster home with an evil woman who would beat us. My mom never hit us, so she thought threats of violence would scare us. I didn't know enough to fear corporal punishment, but I was afraid of losing her, which was a possibility time and again.

One of those times happened when I was in sixth grade and my brother was about five. We didn't have gas in our apartment, so my mother had

boiled water in an electric wok to make pasta. The handle had melted, and when she tried to lift the wok to drain the pasta, the contents spilled onto her pregnant stomach.

"Don't worry, I'll watch your kids," a neighbor said, as the paramedics carted my mother off.

She yelled up from the gurney, "Stay away from my fucking kids you piece of shit! Stefano, stay inside. Keep the door locked." My little brother and I spent the next two days in the tiny apartment, alone and terrified, watching TV and eating uncooked Top Ramen noodles, too scared to use the wok with the melted handle. On the second day, I walked up to Victory Boulevard to find a supermarket where I could steal some food. I was scared to be defying my mom's orders, but I was hungrier than I was obedient.

Other times my mom would just disappear. I would wake up to an empty apartment, quiet except for the noise from the TV that was always on. It would be past 8:00 a.m., so I knew I wasn't going to school, but I would be starving, as kids tend to be when they wake up. She usually arrived home around noon with a single McDonald's breakfast sandwich. The otherwise repulsive smell of that food mixed with old cigarette odor was comforting because it meant she was home and not in jail, dead, or lost. It also meant I didn't have to go in search of something to eat, although by age eleven I knew how to get around.

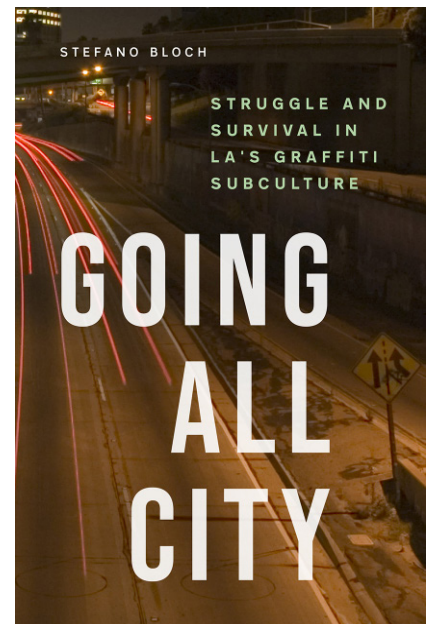
When cops came looking for my stepfather at whatever house, hotel, or apartment we were living in at the time, they would tell me that my mom would go to jail if I didn't tell them where he was. I remember one cop yelling in my ten-year-old face, "Tell us if he is in the house or I am

taking your fucking mother to jail and you will have to live with a bunch of fucking rapists in juvenile hall!" I couldn't tell them because I didn't know where he was, but regardless, juvenile hall sounded better than the foster homes my mom had told me about.

A few times, my mother was taken to jail after a traffic stop, where she would serve a day or two, or maybe a weekend, for a warrant. Once, when I was five, the police took me with her and put us into a holding cell for a few hours. I spent the time spelling out the names carved in the paint on the wall. Other times, I would come home from school to find one of her friends at the house, smoking and nodding off, there to tell me that my mom needed a break from us because we were driving her crazy. In each case, we later found out she had been ordered into a drug rehab facility. And each time, she would leave early, sometimes breaking a court order, and greet us with hugs, a pack of baseball cards, and promises that she would take us to Disneyland for being good kids. Promises of Disneyland were always hanging in the air.

Every couple of years, I would find her in the bathroom after she had ODeD. I would have to open the door by sticking the ink tube from a pen into the hole in the doorknob to release the push-button lock, drag her into the hallway, and, if we didn't have a phone—which was almost always run to a neighbor's to call 911.

My mother's habit of leaving me in her car went on for several years. When I was older, I would leave the car, defying her order to lie low, and instead walk the block catching "Cisco" tags. I had lived in enough neighborhoods to read my surroundings quickly. In fact I felt anonymous, almost invisible, in a



way that worked to my advantage as a writer. I never felt I stood out. My main concern was how my tag would be seen by someone who might pass through the area. I would always find a bus stop and catch a tag at the base of the bench facing an oncoming bus. From there I would find the nearest freeway, walk up an on-ramp to write on a light pole, guardrail, or sign facing oncoming traffic. I caught these tags during the day, usually with no more than a yellow Mean Streak, and I would be back in the car, no incriminating spray paint on my fingers, before anyone called the police. Then I would keep out of sight, not because my mom had told me to but in case my description had been given to the police: shaved head, white T-shirt, blue Dickies, black Nike Cortez shoes.

The audience I cared most about were the people who knew me or knew of me, but I also wrote for myself. I loved to see my work up in places I had been before and think about how my tag lasted long

» BLOCH continued, PG. 7



Both photos courtesy of UChicago Press

## Undergrads Return from Cornell Art, Architecture, and Urban Planning Abroad Program in Rome

By Cayla Kaplan



Photo courtesy of Cayla Kaplan

The Cornell in Rome AAP program was an incredible experience that taught me a lot about effective urban planning for different people, neighborhoods, cities, and countries. Our theme for the semester was urban agriculture. In order to explore this, we traveled to other Italian cities, such as Florence, Venice, Siena, Bologna, Naples, and Turin, in addition to studying food systems within Rome to better understand how their institutions and organizations supported urban agriculture within their various social contexts. It was fascinating to see the comparisons between Southern Italy, Northern Italy, and Tuscany in terms of how the cities operate in regard to food systems. We spoke with residents, visited farms, and reflected on the differences of infrastructure, provisions of service, and urban design of the distinct Italian cities.

In Rome, we were tasked with examining, analyzing, and understanding a single neighborhood within Rome. The neighborhood I studied was called Bravetta Pisana; it's located on the western periphery of Rome. In the first half of the semester we completed a neighborhood analysis which

included an intensive examination into the structure and demographic arrangement of the neighborhood. In an extensive street survey, we mapped out land use, building use, building height, density, street typology, age demographics, and more. This part of the class offered a new perspective in that it was much more technical than many of the other Urban Studies classes I have taken at Brown thus far.

In the second half of the course, building on our theme of urban agriculture, we spoke with residents, local organizations, and active community leaders about their access to their local urban garden. We found that because of the neighborhood's mountainous typology and excess of gated streets, access to the garden proved to be quite a challenge. Working with community members, we developed two proposals for the neighborhood in terms of making accessibility to the garden a top priority. In our conversations, we learned that Bravetta Pisana operated as a very informal neigh-

» ABROAD continued, PG. 7



# NEWS FROM RHODY

## Students work on Little Roady autonomous shuttle pilot

By Rose Carillo



Above and below images from RIDOT

This past semester, I have been a field researcher for 3x3 Design, a Brooklyn-based community-centered design and research firm. Along with fellow Urban Studies concentrator Evan Kindler (‘20), I have primarily been researching how autonomous vehicles can coexist with pedestrians, cyclists, and other motorists in Providence. The Little Roady autonomous shuttle pilot program has been offering free rides from Providence Station to Olneyville square since May of 2019, and will continue through May of 2020. It operates from 6:30am-6:30pm 7 days a week.

It has been very interesting to be a part of this developing technology and to play a role in understanding how it will impact current transportation patterns in Providence and beyond. 3x3 is just one stakeholder of the project. Others include RIDOT, RIPTA, the Providence Planning Department, Brown University, Stae, Bits and Atoms, and May Mobility. May Mobility is a private mobility start-up headquartered in Michigan that deploys and operates the shuttles. It is great to see a successful public-private partnership in Rhode Island and all the work that goes

into implementing such a project. The Little Roady autonomous shuttle pilot project is currently the longest fixed autonomous vehicle route in the world.

My favorite aspect of my job is seeing the technology improve just about every week. The vehicles learn to adapt to their environments and are able to stay in autonomous mode for longer. Whether riders take the shuttle to get to work, to go grocery shopping, or to simply experience being a passenger in a self-driving vehicle, all are welcome to ride this free, public transportation option. ■

*The Little Roady autonomous shuttle pilot project is currently the longest fixed autonomous vehicle route in the world.*



*Learn more at [dot.ri.gov](http://dot.ri.gov).*



## Schools Cont.

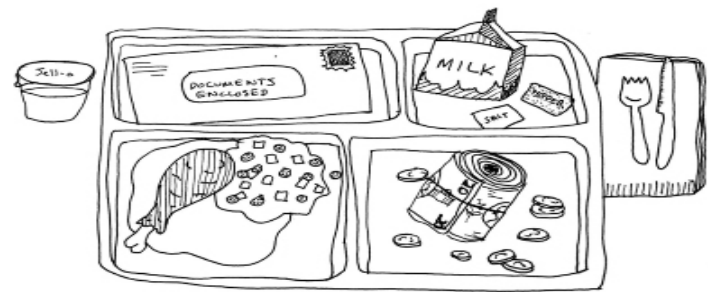


Illustration by Pia Mileaf-Patel

government fired the all-white elected school board, and appointed an entirely new board that included three Latinx members. Since that takeover nearly three decades ago, the school board has maintained substantial Latinx representation within a district with a majority-Latinx population.

Yet Morel emphasizes that successes like this are rare. He argues that the vast majority of takeovers disempower communities of color, and ultimately reveal a “flaw in the structure of our American democracy that is only familiar to poor communities of color.” Because of this dynamic, Morel, who is also a graduate of Central High School in Providence, opposes RIDE’s takeover of schools in Providence. “We have a really unhealthy disconnect between the schools and the communities. These connections just don’t exist,” Morel told us. “I don’t see how the takeover addresses this.”

Additionally, state takeovers do not necessarily address the chronic underfunding that lies at the heart of the educational crisis. According to Morel, the level of funding that students in Providence Public Schools receive is comparable to the state average. Equality, however, isn’t equity. Many of the educational needs specific to Providence—such as the high percentage of English Language Learners who need supplemental support—require, but do not receive, additional funds. State representative Rebecca Kislak also believes that Providence schools are underfunded. “I’m not convinced that we fund our schools adequately,” she told us.

Community organizations in Providence spent the entire summer calling attention to the potential pitfalls of a state takeover at RIDE’s public forums. According to Chanda Womack of ARISE, members of her group, along with those in other community activist groups, “tried everything” to get their opinions heard by Infante-Green. “Nothing has worked,” Womack said. “Even though they have been telling the public that we need community input, there is no action to align with that supposed value.”

In response, ARISE and other activist organizations took to the legal system, and filed a motion against RIDE with the Rhode Island Center For Justice. According to a press release published on September 4th, the motion was filed on behalf of community organizations, parents, and students; it demands a “clear” takeover plan from RIDE that emphasizes both transparency and community engagement. For Womack, the declaration of legal filing is simple and seeks to address the disconnect between the community and the school system: “We’re basically saying that any plan that you come up with that does not center parents, students and community voices is not going to work.” Since RIDE’s takeover gives Commissioner Infante-Green nearly unbridled power over the school system, including the power to appoint a turnaround superintendent for Providence schools, members of ARISE and other community organizations want to be at the table for those decisions and appointments. “We’re asking you basically to honor your word,” says Womack. “Honor what you’re saying by including us.”

Others in the Providence community have additional suggestions for making RIDE’s school reform more transparent. Representative Kislak suggests looking for alternative standards to evaluate the takeover’s success: “I know we’re going to be looking a lot at the [test] scores, and that’s totally valid,” she said. “But scores are not the only thing that matters.” Kislak proposes a community-based process to determine the metrics to track the takeover’s effects on school culture and performance. Debating these standards would bring much-needed accountability to the takeover process, along with providing an additional opportunity for community input.

Morel suggests an immediate increase in the number of school psychologists and community organizers, who can help students handle their mental health and external hardships before problems “bubble up” in the classroom. He



# IN THE DEPT, CONT.

## Rome Cont.

borhood -- when the government did not provide the support that they needed, they would simply take matters into their own hands. Subsequently, one of our suggestions was to embrace this informality and build a path around a specific gate that would entirely allow for residents on the central street of the neighborhood to access the garden. Our second recommendation was to remove the current market and a hazardous gas station, and replace it with an outdoor community center, which many of the residents expressed interest in acquiring.

While the Cornell AAP program was quite challenging, it exposed me to new and sophisticated ways of urban planning, whilst understanding the context of your environment. It was quite different from any of the classes I have taken at Brown simply due to the technicality of the studies and its hands-on approach. Within the course overall, we discussed issues of governance, social inclusion, urban design, and economic development. Learning about all of these topics within the classroom of Rome was an amazing experience that pushed me outside my comfort zone and broadened my urban studies. ■

## Schools Cont.

also believes RIDE needs to invest in a pipeline to improve teacher diversity. “That’s a mid-term to long-term goal so that, as teachers age out, there is an increase of focus on teachers of color, primarily from Rhode Island,” Morel told the us.

According to Morel, there is rightful concern over Providence public schools because the current conditions should be unacceptable. “But how do we create a long-term, sustainable, healthy public school system? You can’t do that without having the community be part of that.” If anything is clear amid the debates over the future of Providence public schools, it’s that students, teachers, and community organizers need to be central to the discussion. While reposting a Twitter announcement by the Center for Justice, the Providence Student Union, an organization that works to build student power in Providence, perfectly articulated the concept: #NothingAboutUsWithoutUs. ■

## Bloch Cont.

after I was gone. So I looked for landmarks in addition to the fame spots on the freeway and bus benches. Tags there did not last long but would get immediate views. I would hit every dumpster in the alley, the bases of streetlights, or the side of a drainpipe on the back of a store. Few people would see these “low-pro” tags other than local writers who would wonder what I was doing there. Prolific taggers do not discriminate when deciding where to write, knowing that every tag counts—every tag gets seen by someone at some point. And behind every tag is a story about survival and about striving to be seen, or a momentary reprieve from deprivation and desperation. ■

## Reflections on Geological Walking Tour of Providence

By Natasha Shatzkin



RISD Fleet Library, photo from Barco Lighting

Natasha Shatzkin, who concentrates in Urban Studies and Geology, reflects below on Urban Studies bus tour #2:

The Rhode Island Hospital Trust Building, where RISD’s Fleet Library is housed, is primarily built of Indiana limestone. Stop and look the next time you pass by – with your bare eyes you can make out some of the billions of compacted shells that form this rock unit, and a microscope reveals countless more. This building was just one of the stops on the second Urban Studies Bus Tour of the year, a walking tour led by Emily Burns of CCRI. The focus was not on the human history of the buildings, but on the geologic history.

Indiana limestone is a massive formation, deposited throughout the Mississippian sub-period from about 360 to 320 million years ago, right before the formation of Pangea. Earth’s continents were squeezing closer and closer together, leaving thin, shallow equatorial seas between them – ideal environments for marine invertebrates. Imagine that what we now call Indiana was something similar to present-day Shark Bay, in Australia: underwater, a shallow lagoon amassing tiny shells.

Geologists these days are quite concerned with the effects that humans, and cities, will

have on the rock record. Remnants of human structures alongside the typical sandstones and granites might serve as the geological marker for the start of the mythical “Anthropocene” period, where human activity has become the primary control on the environment. Yet on the whole, urban historians aren’t concerned with the pasts of building stones. Rock origins don’t seem to wield enough influence on day-to-day city life to be worth the effort.

But on your walk up Westminster Street – or if you spot the Indiana limestone in the bas-reliefs at Rockefeller Center, or cladding the Empire State Building – think how lucky it is that those shallow seas could provide for invertebrate creatures, that they could sort out the shells from the sand and the mud! What has been left is pleasantly light-colored; strong, durable, and carvable because of its homogeneity; fireproof: a limestone meant for building with. ■

## Housing Cont.

with **South Coast Fair Housing** on “studentification,” or gentrification driven by students. “South Coast’s mission has to do with fighting discrimination that occurs against people in federally protected classes,” said Bull, so in this project, students worked to determine if private housing discriminates against families in favor of students. “All private housing should be open across federal protected classes,” she said.

4. Working with a doctoral student at **Boston University**, another group evaluated tenant selection plans for subsidized housing, such as criminal background and eviction history. “The group wanted to understand how management of subsidized housing filters out who has housing,” said Bull. “They took a descriptive approach of what management agencies are doing today,” she continued, comparing current practices to

HUD guidelines, and from there, determining best practices for local implementation.

Bull was adamant that housing is a productive issue for student involvement “because it’s connected to everything else,” and so many local groups already work on the issue. She also underscored that Brown is unique in its ability, as a university, to tackle these issues because of the “effectiveness and longevity of the student group HOPE, Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere.” Many students from HOPE participated in the course, who Bull said were “critically reflective of their impacts on the community and the ways they contribute.” Although Bull is a visiting lecture, she said “Urban Studies should continue offering courses that deal with housing. It’s too critical an issue to not address it for Urban Studies majors.” ■



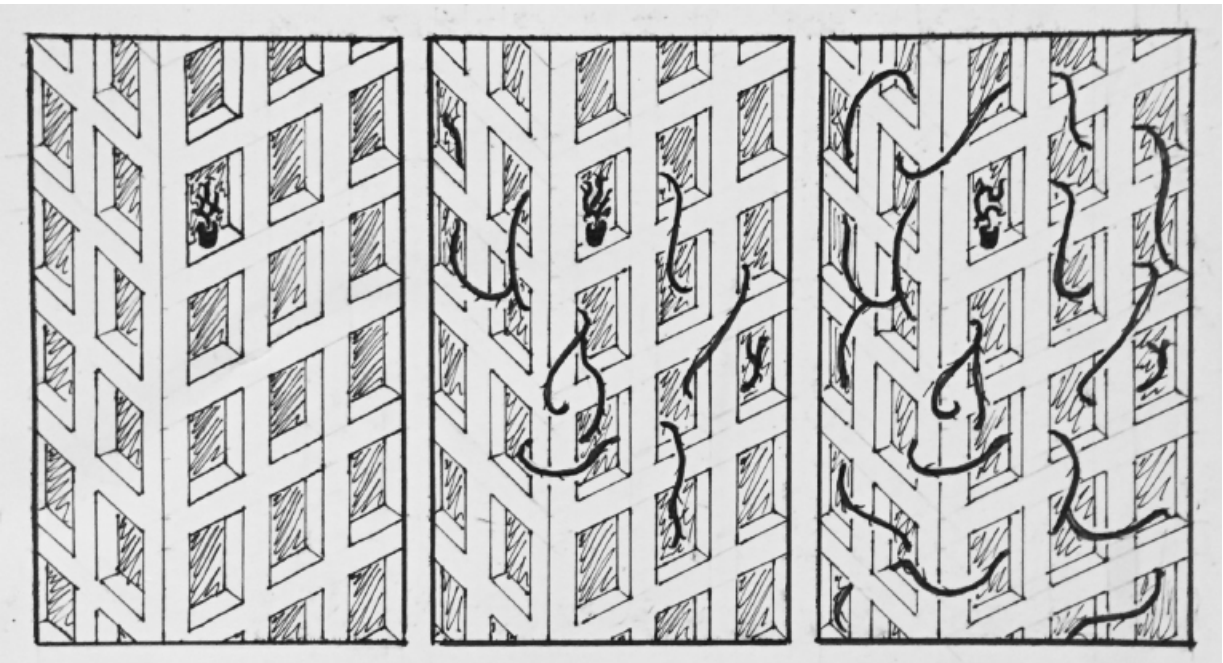
# ETCETERA

Rendering of what I-195  
will look like after  
completion



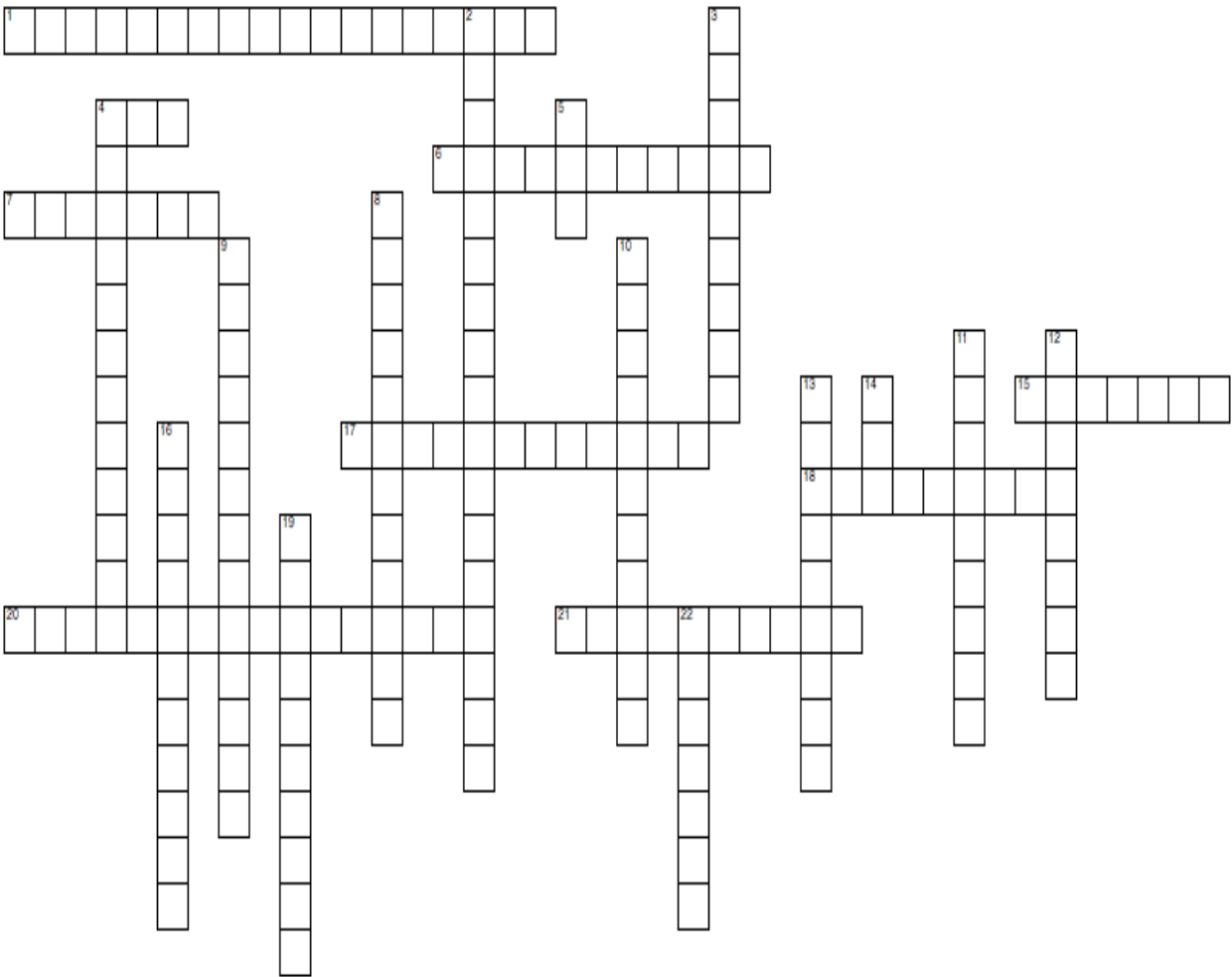
Historic meme by URBN  
alum Anzia Anderson  
‘19. Do you think the  
1-195 relocation lived  
up to this standard? Send  
your answers to anzia\_  
anderson@alumni.brown.  
edu.

“Smart Growth”  
by former Urban  
Newsletter editor  
and graphic artist  
Colin Kent-Daggett,  
‘19.5.



## URBN Crossword

By Ella Comberg



### ACROSS

- 1 If you appear on this famed TV show, Frank Caprio will fine you or make fun of you
- 4 Not quite a B.Arch
- 6 The only state with two unique words in its name.
- 7 The upspace or the airport
- 15 a three story house connected to another adjoining house
- 17 Waterfire’s founder
- 18 Primary challenger to Raimondo in 2018
- 20 It cost \$21 mil.
- 21 The closest casino to Providence

### DOWN

- 2 Speaker of the RI House
- 3 Vegan Food Hall
- 4 Small town in Northern RI with big claim to environmental fame
- 5 Mosquitos’ scorn this summer
- 8 New book by former URBN prof and graffiti writer
- 9 Bird and Lime, for example
- 10 It’s not the West End
- 11 Collaborative design session
- 12 Some say downtown, others say \_\_\_\_\_
- 13 POLS 0220 prof
- 14 They make slot machines and are HQ’d in PVD
- 16 The opposite of dumb suburbs
- 19 She had her eyes on the street
- 22 Venda’s famous