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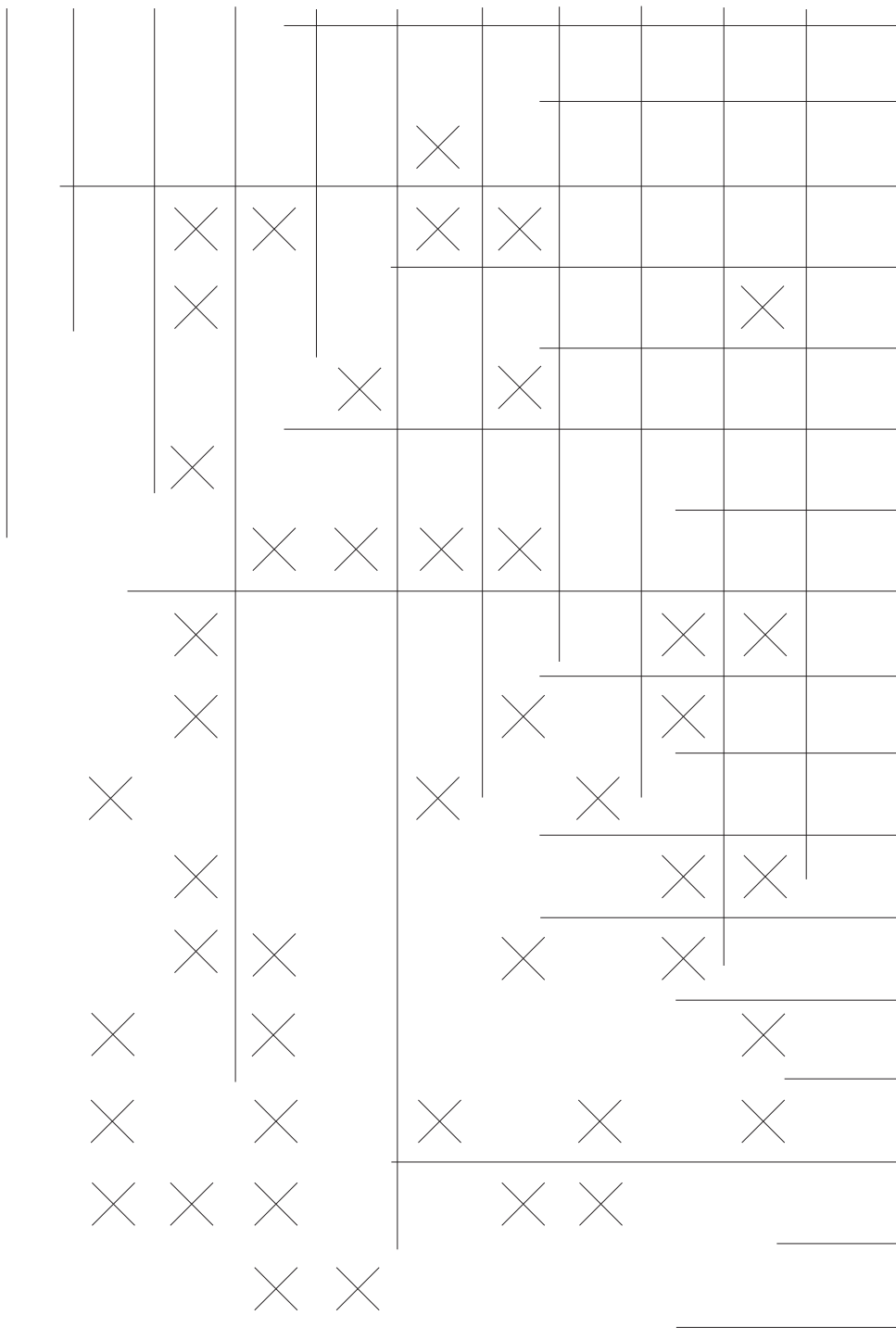
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**FROM THE EDITOR**  
**The Value of the Urban Journal**  
*by Colin Kent-Daggett*

The fifth volume of the Urban Journal illustrates the powerful variety that Urban Studies offers: creative writing, academic writing, photography, architecture, political science, architecture, environmental studies, and more explore cities, geographies, and spaces across space and time. Though this variety, in theory, risks trading breadth for depth, the contributions to this volume show how, in practice, that is not the case. Other dichotomies are interrogated by both individual pieces in the Journal and the diversity of the volume: politics and aesthetics; individuals and structures; “tradition and modernity.” By experiencing these intersections as revelations, as opposed to novelties, we can all better understand our intricate and increasingly urban world.



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## THE CLEAN AND THE UNCLEAN

### Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko's Balcony Photographs

by Ella Comberg

2019

Published in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution, Vladimir Mayakovsky's 1918 play *Mystery Bouffe* satirized the events of the prior year with a quasi-biblical journey: after a flood overtakes the earth, the proletariat (whom Mayakovsky allegorizes as the "Unclean") overthrow the bourgeoisie (the "Clean"), steering their boat to the Promised Land.<sup>1</sup> The thrust of *Mystery Bouffe*'s circus—the triumph of the Unclean over the Clean—typifies the aesthetic politics of Mayakovsky's intellectual circle, which called for and enacted the destruction of moralizing, petty bourgeois cleanliness with the more honest (and dirtier) worker's art. These positions were concretized in *LEF*, an avant-garde journal of literature, arts, and culture edited by Osip Brik and Sergei Tretyakov, to which the likes of Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, and Alexander Rodchenko contributed. In both *LEF* (1923–25) and its second iteration *Novyi Lef* (1927–29), the group advocated for an honest, realist tendency in art and literature that they termed "Factography." Like the documentary photograph, all work published in *LEF* and *Novyi Lef* would be grounded not in romantic musings but in the facts of the visual, knowable world.<sup>2</sup> The cover of the first ever edition of *Novyi Lef* (Figure 1), for example, features a photograph by Rodchenko of his apartment building's balconies from below. In its gritty, chiaroscuro reality, the photograph neither valorizes nor decries its subject. This is the factographic paradigm.

At least in theory, the *LEF* group's insistence that their work's content be grounded in reality is similar to the contemporaneous movement at the German Bauhaus school, where teachers urged their artist pupils to take on a utilitarian role in society. Indeed, manifestos by leaders of both groups are clear that imagining art as a form of artisanal production could allow the artist to overcome the alienation of mechanized labor that was, at the time, eclipsing their field. Brik, writing in *LEF* in 1924, compelled the artist "Forward! – to the overcoming of this alienation. Forward! – to the union of artist and factory."<sup>3</sup> Walter Gropius, founder and chief-architect of the Bauhaus is less rhetorically galvanizing, but his idea is essentially comparable: "The Bauhaus," he writes, "aimed at the training of people possessing artistic talents as designers in industry and handicrafts."<sup>4</sup>

Still, the politics of two often-compared groups were by no means identical—a fact that becomes clear when viewed in the context of *Mystery Bouffe*. Where the class configuration of post-revolutionary Soviet life made destruction of bourgeois taste by way of an "Unclean," proletariat-led flood a legitimate political position, the reality of German capitalism in the 1920s meant that the Bauhaus had to acquiesce to commodity culture to survive, even on the margins of society. So, while both groups sought to reach a broad audience and hoped their art, design and literature would be accessible to the general public, the Bauhaus—constantly under threat of closure for its leftist tendencies and hoping to engender a better society through radically modernist de-



Figure 1, *Novyi Lef*, No.1 (1927).

sign—took to the market. Mass-producing well-designed goods became a democratizing force in a country that had failed its artisan class with alienated labor.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the Bauhaus mirrored the moralizing, cleansing bourgeoisie of Mystery Bouffe more so than they did the dirty, rising proletariat that the LEF embodied.

Nowhere is this ideological and aesthetic contrast clearer than, paradoxically, in two strikingly similar photographs: Rodchenko's *Balconies* (Figure 2) and Bauhaus photographer Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's *Bauhaus Balconies* (Figure 3). These photos of dense, high-rise modern architecture taken from below are, at least formally, uncannily similar. But upon closer inspection, the subject matter is differentiated through Mystery Bouffe's dialectic: while Moholy-Nagy photographs the Dessau Bauhaus' pristine, white stucco main building, Rodchenko photographs the grittier working-class apartment building in Moscow, composed of dark, uneven brick. If Moholy's building is the "Clean," Rodchenko's is the "Unclean."

Even accounting for the architectural differences in the buildings depicted, the formal similarities between the two photos were undeniable, even at the time of production. By the time *Novyi Lef*'s sixth issue was published in 1928, Rodchenko would have to defend this photo against criticism that he had plagiarized it from Moholy-Nagy. An anonymous letter published in *Sovetskoe Foto* in 1927 placed photographs by Rodchenko alongside photos by Western photographers, including Moholy-Nagy. All the photos were accompanied by dates, with the Rodchenko works coming a few years after each of the Western photographs. The only exception was *Bauhaus Balconies*, for which the author omitted the date (likely because Rodchenko's actually came two years before Moholy-Nagy's). Still, the letter's message was clear: "let the reader draw his own inferences from the material presented here."<sup>6</sup>

The implications of such an allegation were likewise easily legible: Rodchenko was committed to Soviet nationalism and the Communist Party in his politics, but in his art, he aligned himself with the West. In his response in *Novyi Lef*, Rodchenko does not deny Moholy-Nagy's influence on him, writing that their work's similarity should not "serve to disparage the work of such an excellent master as Moholy-Nagy, a man whom I value very highly. . . ." Nor does he neglect his influence on Moholy-Nagy: "[Moholy-Nagy] asked me several times to send him my photographs. He knows them very well and he values my work. . . . I exerted a considerable influence on him, and he has often written about this."<sup>7</sup>

The portrait Rodchenko paints of his relationship to Moholy-Nagy (which is confirmed by texts in which Moholy-Nagy explicitly cites Rodchenko as an influence) is not one of plagiarism but mutual respect. If the two photographers were not maliciously copying each other's work—and if their politics were not identical—what makes for the uncanny similarity in their dizzying urban photographs from the late twenties? The answer is, perhaps, that the oblique angle offered a uniquely compelling—part avant-garde, part vernacular—mechanism for these artists to confront their respective built environments, Moscow and Dessau. Even if the urban form itself differed from brick to stucco (the former an unclean manifestation of the real-life proletariat revolution, the latter a streamlined expression of good design intended for the consumer masses), both urban inhabitants Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko strike the same pose, shooting "from the belly-button."<sup>8</sup>





Figure 2, Rodchenko, *Balconies* 1925.



Figure 3, Moholy-Nagy, *Bauhaus Balconies*, 1928.

Peter Galassi, former Chief Curator of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, argues in the catalogue for the museum’s 1998 Rodchenko retrospective that for both Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko, photography—unlike painting—was an immediately modern and democratic medium.<sup>9</sup> For Rodchenko, it enacted the *Mystery Bouffe* idyll, sweeping away bourgeois painting with the kind of industrial-communist realism favored by *Novyi Lef*. Moholy-Nagy likewise looked to photography as anti-elitist answer to the too-academic “easel painting,” arguing in his book *Painting, Photography, Film* that photography’s inherent technological mechanisms made it the appropriate medium for the modern, industrial era. The impulse towards the camera for both artists is cloaked in the assumption that their work, if iconographic and legible, would be more publicly accessible and in turn more collectivist than movements like Suprematism, which had tried to be universalist in theory but failed to be galvanizing in practice. As Benjamin Buchloh argues, modernist artists otherwise opposed to iconography leaned into representation with photos of people and things as “a necessary strategy to implement the transformation of audiences”—a goal that resonated with both Rodchenko’s explicitly communist LEF group and with artists at the Bauhaus, where designers were trained to serve the public rather than, say, the museum.<sup>10</sup> In *Painting, Photography, Film*, Moholy-Nagy places advertisements next to traditional portraits and his own photographs on a single page, demonstrating just this compul-

sion to lower avant-garde photography (like his and Rodchenko's) to the level of the vernacular.<sup>11</sup> The desire to be an artist of the people is as legible in Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko's writings as it is in their portraits: both men dress in workers' jumpsuits (Figures 4 and 5).

For Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko, to use the camera was to democratize their work. Still, the two modernists were unwilling abandon the avant-garde completely. The oblique angle, employed in both Bauhaus Balconies and Balconies, offered a solution to this problem. By arresting the ways of looking that had, for so long, been employed by painters and reproduced by photographers, the oblique "signaled a dual liberation: of photography from painting and the artist from the shackles of tradition."<sup>12</sup> What's more, the oblique allowed for abstraction, collapsing space into planes—a move visible in both photographs in question, where the building against the sky does not create depth as much as it does a flattened contrast in color. In her analysis of another photograph in the Bauhaus balconies series, for example, Eleanor Hight offers this reading of the building's abstraction: "the flat white areas of the wall, the dark panes of glass, and the reflections in the windows serve as compositional elements."<sup>13</sup> The photograph, then, is akin to Moholy-Nagy's geometric paintings in which two-dimensional colors contrast on the canvas. But in order to remain intelligible to the viewer, Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko had to continually ground their work in the visible, often mundane world; they could only abstract so far. Unlike Moholy-Nagy's photograms or Rodchenko's hanging constructions, their single-frame oblique photos use known

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Figure 4, Lucia Moholy-Nagy, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 1925



Figure 5, Rodchenko portrait, N.d.

places—the Bauhaus, the Moscow courtyard—as frames of reference. In turn, the photographs in question straddle the avant-garde and the vernacular—a model that would have been compelling to modernists like Rodchenko and Moholy-Nagy who refused to retreat into artistic reclusion.

If their mode of depiction was similar, so too were the spaces Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko captured in their single-frame photography. Rehearsing Moholy-Nagy's philosophy that the photograph was the proper modern medium to depict the modern world, both he and Rodchenko capture modern architecture in their photographs. In *Bauhaus Balconies*, Moholy-Nagy signals his allegiances to the International Style with no ambiguity—the white stucco walls and steel balconies in the shot are unmistakably Walter Gropius' Bauhaus Dessau building, which housed classrooms, studios, and student and “junior master” flats.<sup>14</sup> A similar collectivist dream is marked in Rodchenko's *Balconies*, which shows the success of architects in the post-revolutionary period to “reorganize the life of the mass population according to the direction outlined in the Bolshevik party's Marxist programme,” including the introduction of “new cooperative and collective ways of living that would free women for useful work, provide some framework of daily life for orphans . . . as well as fostering the new political consciousness.”<sup>15</sup> If the Bauhaus was a small-scale vision of state-sponsored collective living (and indeed, construction of the Gropius building was financed by the City of Dessau), the NEP-era housing projects undertaken by the Soviet government were a large-scale realization of the collectivist architectural fantasy. Unlike in their paintings, Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko's photographs do not indulge in the kind of geometric abstraction that saw collectivism in the universal inspecificity of planar forms; instead, they depict the architecturally collectivist, dense, hyper-specific building (the Bauhaus Dessau or Rodchenko's own apartment building), to propagate the vague idea of a collectivist politics.

The similarities between Rodchenko and Moholy-Nagy's balcony photographs are indeed vague: it might be true that the impulse to photograph the built environment “from the belly button” is located in a desire to be at once vernacular and avant-garde, but to say as much is to ignore the particularities of the Bauhaus and LEF, of Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko. Creeping behind the visual similarities of the photographs is their ideological singularity. Victor Margolin posits that we can interpret this ideological difference through the framework of the “productive” and the “reproductive.” Drawing from Moholy-Nagy's contention in *Painting, Photography, Film* that photography should “wish to produce systematically, since it is important for life that we create new relationships,” Margolin argues that Rodchenko's work did the reverse, simply reproducing the world around him as a way to work through the realities of post-revolutionary life on a personal level.<sup>16</sup> In reality, of course, both Rodchenko and Moholy-Nagy are simply reproducing their surroundings—in these two works, at the very least, neither of them does more than look up in a place they already know well. But in a more theoretical sense, we might say the buildings depicted are productive of a particular aesthetic, political ideal: the white stucco of the Bauhaus is a cleansing, perhaps didactic modernism intended to be sold (as product and as ideology) to the

general public, and the brick apartment building of NEP-era Moscow is a government project interested more in housing people than International Style aesthetics (evident in the brick facade).

Ultimately, however, these buildings—if not the photographs—are both “productive” (or, indicative of an imagined urban archetype). We might even call them prototypes. Gropius’ Dessau was the only building ever to be constructed for the school, with most of its pupils’ blueprints going unerecited; similarly, the NEP-era housing that Rodchenko photographed in 1925 would prove unsatisfactory, with troves of radical urban youth moving out of the city and into the countryside to live on communes by 1929. The lasting, mass-scale housing projects in major Soviet cities would not come until the 1950s and 60s with the introduction of the brutalist Khrushchyovka.<sup>17</sup>

The oblique angle, then, can be read as a necessity. In cropping the building to include only its upper stories against the sky, the viewer is privy only to architecture, not context. We see the Bauhaus’ perfected style, not its desolate surroundings—that is, its failure to grow, its inability to spread its leftist, artist-as-worker principles beyond the walls of its always-stifled school. In cropping out the Miasnitskaia streetscape, Rodchenko shows us only the success of this period, not its failures—we see the exuberance of a post-revolutionary avant garde that would soon be crushed by a ban on all art production other than government-sanctioned Socialist Realism. Examined closely, these ideals (stucco and brick) are indeed different—a fact that’s unsurprising given the political realities of Weimar Germany and the Soviet Union respectively in this period. And while the mechanism through which these two photographers reproduced their urban surroundings (or, produced a new way of seeing it) is no less than identical, Moholy-Nagy’s willingness to abstract would become his fame; for Rodchenko, it would be his last honest political project before he was forced to photograph government exercises in the 1930s.<sup>18</sup> In a reversal of the Mystery Bouffe narrative, the Clean eclipsed the Unclean.



## ON PHILADELPHIA'S DISTRICT ATTORNEY Are Prosecutors the Next Tool for Cities to Fight Mass Incarceration? by Rachel Rood-Ojalvo

2019

Larry Krasner joked during his campaign for the Office of the District Attorney of Philadelphia that he spent his career “becoming completely unelectable.”<sup>1</sup> Most of his opponents, including his fellow Democrats, were longtime prosecutors. Krasner, on the other hand, had never worked for the District Attorney’s office. He was a civil rights and defense attorney who had represented Black Lives Matter and sued the police department over 75 times.<sup>2</sup> In early 2017, when the progressive Krasner announced to the staff of his law firm that he was running for District Attorney, “they erupted in laughter.”<sup>3</sup> With a less affectionate type of humor, the president of Philadelphia’s police union called Krasner’s candidacy “hilarious.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, Krasner beat six other Democrats in the primary and went on to win the November 2017 general election with 75% of the vote.<sup>5</sup> Krasner decided that “the most effective way to transform the criminal justice system – to make it more just – was from a position of authority within that system.”<sup>6</sup> After being sworn in in January of 2018, Krasner now has that power.

So, how did he do it? How did a progressive candidate get elected the most powerful prosecutor in Philadelphia? How can Krasner’s success help us better understand the urban regime around him? And, what might Krasner’s story mean for the role of prosecutors in criminal justice reform more broadly? In the rest of this essay, I will explore these questions.

### *Philadelphia Before Krasner*

In order to understand Larry Krasner’s campaign for reform, it is important to understand why Philadelphia needed reform. Long before Krasner was elected District Attorney, mass incarceration and the War on Drugs hit Philadelphia hard. The city, like the rest of the country in the late 20th century, adopted policies that disproportionately filled its jail cells with Black and Brown people. Police used racially discriminatory practices, such as stop-and-frisk and civil-asset forfeiture, so that the brunt of mass incarceration’s devastation landed on poor communities of color.<sup>7</sup> In 1970, the capacity of the city’s jail system was 2,700 people. By 2010, the capacity had been built up to 6,800; however, due to overcrowding, 9,800 people were held in the jail at that time, many of them triple-celled in spaces meant for two.<sup>8</sup> Today, the city still claims the unfortunate title of the highest incarceration rate of any large jurisdiction in the United States.<sup>9</sup> The racial disparities within these statistics are stark: although just over half of Philadelphia’s population is Black, nearly three quarters of its incarcerated population is Black.<sup>10</sup>

Philadelphia’s overall demographics shifted over the past several decades, too. Between 1990 and 2010, the city’s population hovered around 1.5 million, dropping only slightly.<sup>11</sup> However, the drastic change of the time period was that the white popula-

tion declined by nearly one third.<sup>12</sup> The Black population remained relatively stable in number, growing only 3%, but moved geographically. For example, Northeast Philly went from 92% to 58% white and from 3% to 18% Black.<sup>13</sup> To understand the urban regime, it is important to recognize that in 1990, Philadelphia “was a majority–white city with a large black minority and small groups of Hispanics and Asians. Two decades later, it is a plurality–black city with a large but dwindling white minority and rapidly expanding contingents of Hispanics and Asians.”<sup>14</sup> These demographics allude to the coalition and electorate that would later elect Krasner: largely Black voters and voters of color.

To expand further on this formative twenty–year span in Philadelphia’s history, it was from 1991 to 2010 that District Attorney Lynne Abraham earned her reputation as one of the nation’s “deadliest DAs” for her zealous use of the death penalty.<sup>15</sup> Notoriously punitive, Abraham has been called the “Queen of Death” because of the 108 death–penalty convictions her office secured in her 19 years as District Attorney.<sup>16</sup> Her successor and Krasner’s predecessor, R. Seth Williams, won by painting himself as a “reasonable reformer” in contrast to Abraham.<sup>17</sup> Williams’ 2009 campaign slogan was: “A new day, a new DA.”<sup>18</sup> He often said that “crime prevention is more important than crime prosecution,” and he expressed support for some reform policies like restorative justice programming and an end to the jail’s overcrowding.<sup>19</sup> The city embraced this level of reform, perhaps energized by President Obama’s election the year before, and Williams won with more than 75% of the vote to become Philadelphia’s first African American District Attorney.<sup>20</sup> As it turns out, Williams’ “vague reformer–tinged language” was mostly empty talk.<sup>21</sup> By the end of his tenure, Philadelphia had locked up more of its residents per capita than any other major city. One in four defendants was being held in jail simply because of an inability to pay bail.<sup>22</sup> In 2017, near the end of Williams’ second term, he resigned and was later federally indicted on 23 counts of bribery, extortion, and fraud.<sup>23</sup>

Williams’ replacement, Kelley Hodge, was selected by the Philadelphia Common Pleas Court Board of Judges to serve as interim District Attorney and complete the final five and a half months of Williams’ second term.<sup>24</sup> Hodge, the first African American woman to serve as Philadelphia District Attorney, wrote in her letter of interest to the Board of Judges that her “legal foundation is deeply rooted in [her] initial employment as an assistant public defender in Richmond, Virginia.”<sup>25</sup> So, Hodge shared some of the reform–minded philosophy and an understanding of the ways in which the justice system harms and abandons poor communities of color. However, she also mentioned her training as a city prosecutor in the District Attorney’s office and her belief in the importance of traditional prosecution as a main tool for city safety. Thus, the trajectory from Abraham to Williams to Hodge shows some willingness and desire on Philadelphia’s part to move from pro–incarceration prosecutors to more reform–minded agendas, albeit with some caution. Still, most people were surprised when the 2017 election swung the pendulum as far to the left as progressive Larry Krasner.

*The Shift*

Williams, the last Philadelphia District Attorney voted in by general election before Larry Krasner, was sworn into the office on January 4th, 2010. The very next day on January 5th, Michelle Alexander's groundbreaking book on the race and class inequalities embedded in the United States' criminal justice system, *The New Jim Crow*, was published. What changed between the publication of *The New Jim Crow* in 2010 and Larry Krasner's election in 2017? How did Philadelphia's urban regime shift from the "deadly" District Attorney Abraham, to moderate reformers Williams and Hodge, to leftist progressive Krasner?

In part, the country woke up. First, to the issue of mass incarceration. *The New Jim Crow* is largely credited for popularizing the unjust story of mass incarceration. In her book, Alexander argues that mass incarceration is the rebirth of a caste system in the United States, following slavery and Jim Crow, that has resulted in millions of African Americans locked behind bars and then relegated to a permanent second-class status once released from incarceration. The book has amplified the conversation and action around criminal justice reform.

Second, to the role of prosecutors. In his book *Locked In*, law professor John Pfaff challenges the Standard Story set forth by Alexander and others. He claims that analyses of, and therefore responses to, mass incarceration have missed the mark by overlooking the role of prosecutors in building mass incarceration. Pfaff describes how harsh legislation alone cannot affect prison populations: "In the first decade after the [Rockefeller Drug Laws] were passed, the number of inmates in New York prisons on drug charges barely budged. The laws were tougher, but prosecutors weren't using them." The rise in rates of incarceration did not change when the bills passed; they changed when prosecutors decided to press charges. This was not a legislative shift but an attitudinal one about who to arrest and how harshly to charge them. For Pfaff, the unchecked role of prosecutors represents a major cause of mass incarceration as well as a major problem: "one decision by county prosecutors – the decision about whether to file felony charges against someone arrested by the police – seems responsible for a lion's share of the growth in prison admissions since crime started dropping in the early 1990s." Although there were less people entering the criminal justice system during the tenure of a District Attorney like Abraham, more of those people faced the likelihood of felony conviction and prison time.

From this argument, Pfaff concludes that since the Standard Story overlooks the power of prosecutors, so did reformers ignore prosecutors in their responses to criminal injustice. (Krasner's election, and the wave of progressive prosecutors that he is part of, indicate reformers might be correcting for this error.) Prosecutors are actually "the most powerful actors in the criminal justice system." They are also directly elected, making District Attorney elections an avenue for reform: "elections can control the



prosecutors' actions, keeping them consistent with public values.” However, a study of prosecutor elections across the United States shows that incumbents rarely lose, which indicates a barrier to change. For example, in Philadelphia over the last forty years, every District Attorney has been elected to at least two terms (minus Hodge who finished Williams' second term and Krasner who will be up for re-election in 2021). After Williams' resignation, Krasner was able to capitalize on an open field without an incumbent.

To account for the significance of District Attorney elections, Robert Dahl, an important political scientist, would describe Philadelphia as a pluralist democracy of dispersed inequalities. As mentioned earlier in the report on demographic changes, Philadelphia grew to be “plurality-black.” Dahl views cities as republics of unequal citizens who can move in and out of the political stratum relatively easily (although he acknowledges that social, racial, and economic barriers limit influence). Thus, Dahl concludes that voting is key. In a pluralist society, political consensus is a recurring process in which people with different amounts of political resources negotiate interpretations and applications of the fundamental democratic creed. As such, the District Attorney election offered the citizens of Philadelphia a chance to reach a new political consensus. As Dahl might say, community stakeholders used their resources to move into the political sphere, make their voices heard, and create a new, radical, and progressive vision of the role of District Attorney.

Another important, related shift in the urban regime behind Krasner's success is that grassroots organizers figured out how to take into account Philadelphia's “cultural, political, social, and economic forces that impact the local ecology of civic engagement.” Not only did they use their resources, but they understood their environment. The authors in *Transforming the City*, a collection of academic essays on effective community organizing in the face of challenges to political change, assert that “neighborhood organizing must be ultimately directed toward changes in the law and in the distribution of political power, and toward the creation of multiracial geographically broad coalitions.” In this way, organizers can reinvigorate civic engagement in urban communities. These inclusive steps are especially important to a campaign like Krasner's, which aims to turn the District Attorney's office into a tool to fight mass incarceration rather than perpetuate it, as one of the greatest barriers to community organizing for political change is “a history of civic and political marginality experienced by those who occupy the lower ranks of society's system of stratification.” Community organizing, as seen in Krasner's win, has an important role to play as part of a larger progressive movement to end historical marginalization. Thus, I will now turn to Krasner's campaign and tenure so that I can apply these frameworks to his election as the District Attorney of Philadelphia.

#### *Larry Krasner's Philadelphia*

Krasner likes to say that he wrote his “simple” campaign platform – to eliminate cash bail, address police misconduct, and end mass incarceration – on a napkin. In the speech announcing his candidacy, he accused the District Attorney's office of bringing

“black and brown people from less prosperous neighborhoods into the system when that was in fact unnecessary and destructive.” Krasner campaigned on a platform of changing that culture, “vowing to ‘decarcerate’ Philadelphia, reform cash bail, treat drug addiction as a medical issue rather than a crime, protect immigrants and focus on serious criminals over low-level offenders, and not seek the death penalty.” With the support of citywide grassroots coalitions, national progressive groups, and a \$1.45 million donation from liberal billionaire George Soros, Krasner won. Not only did he win, but he garnered the highest voter turnout in a Philadelphia District Attorney election in twenty years. The turnout was nearly 70% higher than for the previous election in 2013.

First, a look at the citywide grassroots efforts. Krasner won thanks to a multiracial geographically broad coalition, as *Transforming the City* advises. In support of his campaign, community organizers built the Coalition for a Just DA. Founded by a local media justice organization, the racial justice organization Color of Change, and the ACLU of Pennsylvania, the Coalition for a Just DA mobilized broadly to elect Krasner. It grew to include groups hailing from the city’s Black, Latino and LGBTQ communities and “represented the Philadelphia populations most affected by the criminal justice system: immigrant families, incarcerated teenagers, sex workers and victims of violent crimes.” The coalition also included a base formed by incarcerated folks in the SCI-Graterford Pennsylvania state prison, who offered a “blueprint for other prisoners, their families and community groups to wage a grassroots radical criminal justice reform campaign... recognizing the possibilities of mobilizing new constituencies and keeping the focus on building inclusive coalitions and winning real change.”

Why did the community organizers decide to enter the political stratum when they did? Of the largest cities in America, Philadelphia is the poorest and has the highest rates of incarceration and opioid-overdose deaths. As the city’s population grew more racially diverse and a new generation became politically active, “its ‘tough on crime’ policies fell further out of sync with its residents’ views.” Krasner emerged to give voice to these residents, arguing that “a slate of ambitious reforms... was the way to make the city not only more equitable but also safer.” During Krasner’s campaign, “hundreds of people – activists he had represented, supporters of Bernie Sanders, Black Lives Matter leaders, former prisoners – knocked on tens of thousands of doors on his behalf.” The Pennsylvania Working Families Party campaigned for him too. Thus, the urban regime’s broad coalition formed and mobilized.

Second, national support proved significant for Krasner. Since progressives have zeroed in on electing prosecutors as an avenue for reform, billionaire George Soros and his Safety and Justice Super PAC are “providing the cash to make it happen.” As Paul Peterson writes in his pioneering book on *City Limits*, redistributive policies are not easily implemented by local governments because policies that benefit low-income communities of color require a substantial fiscal base. City interests, which include those programs that improve the city’s economic position, social prestige, and political power, “limit city policies and condition what local governments do.” Although

Soros' donation went toward the campaign and not directly toward redistributive policies, the money did provide substantial backing for Krasner's promises for policies aimed at reforming the criminal justice system. As a next step, the genius of Krasner's reform agenda is that it does not require taking money away from developmental policies. Instead, it avoids Peterson's obstacle of city limits by repurposing the office of the District Attorney to pursue reform, and to save taxpayer money on incarceration. Third, a look at the opposition: not all members of the urban regime supported Krasner. In fact, he seemed to "please no one in power." Philadelphia's Democratic Party establishment did not support his candidacy in the primary. The police union spoke out against him in the primary and general elections. The Philadelphia Inquirer, the official newspaper of a strongly Democratic city, endorsed his Republican opponent who was a longtime prosecutor. Former D.A. Abraham accused Krasner of being soft on crime. But none of these critics held enough clout to stop the progressive movement. Combining grassroots organizing with help from national-level progressives, Krasner used the support of a mobilized coalition to win election.

So, after the urban regime chose reform, how has Krasner implemented his progressive policies since taking office? First, he required his new class of assistant district attorneys to read *The New Jim Crow*. Then he asked thirty-one prosecutors, those who would be resistant to the office's reforms, to resign. He hired sixteen new lawyers, most former public defenders. Krasner sent a staff memo outlining new policies as "an effort to end mass incarceration and bring balance back to sentencing." In the memo, he ordered his office to stop prosecuting marijuana possession and to steer more defendants toward diversion programs. In arguably the memo's most radical inclusion, Krasner called for prosecutors to point out in court the impact that the recommended sentence would have on the defendant's family ties, employment prospects, or access to public assistance, as well as how much the sentence would cost. Krasner also created a new position in his office, a counsel "whose sole job would be to protect the undocumented from any collateral consequences of their involvement with the legal system."

To keep pushing these reforms and continue the coalition, community activists who campaigned for Krasner now meet monthly with District Attorney staff, touting a "co-government model." In another important step toward broadening the coalition, the chief defender for the Defender Association of Philadelphia says that the most radical change over the past year is that she now has a "willing partner" in the District Attorney. Altogether, the sea change in the District Attorney's office is exciting proof of what can happen when community organizers successfully mobilize to build a coalition and advance progressive reform agendas.

### *Conclusion*

Larry Krasner's successful campaign for the District Attorney of Philadelphia is an example of the power of community organizing for progressive politics. As Krasner states, "Every single day, we are trying to write policy, and also have policy carried

out... That's the real struggle. It's not flicking a light switch on or off. Culture eats policy." Culture is important; to make substantive change, his office and his coalition take into account the local ecology of civic engagement. Their policies account for the culture of Philadelphia, its capacity and its shortcomings, and they are responding to long-ignored needs of the community.

Krasner's success shows that prosecutor elections are a promising avenue for criminal justice reform, and that city politics can implement innovative reforms even while the federal government insists on "tough on crime" policies. In cities, broad coalitions are an important base. As next steps for building the coalition even more moving forward, Krasner will need to win the trust of the police, the line prosecutors he now supervises, and the judges. Then, he will have strong support from the urban regime and will be able to bring about real reform.

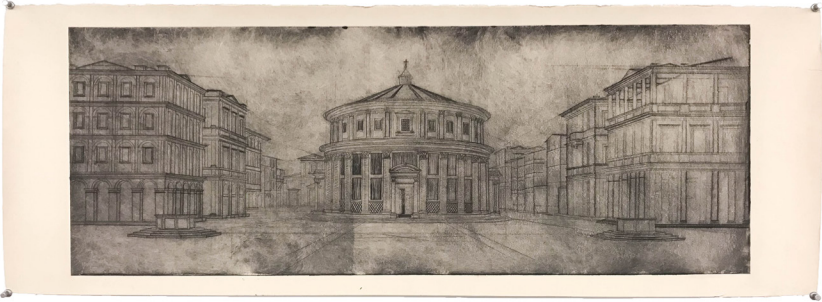
2019



**INSURGENT CITY**  
*by Brenton Duhan*

A series of prints that fragments and distorts the image of the Ideal City, suggesting the potential that friction and diversity within an urban landscape has to open new worlds and possibilities that are unforeseen but necessary to the proper functioning of an urban environment. Drypoint Prints on paper and Fabric, 48" x 14", Fall 2018.

2019



*Ideal City*





2019



*Fragment*





**TEMPORARY ASYLUM****The City as a Fleeting Refuge from the Past***by Ben Chiacchia*

2019

The city is an immersive environment, one so vibrant and busy that detail is often lost in the sea of macro features. Because of this, it is often possible for people to disappear in plain sight, moving amongst millions of bodies as a constituent part of a collective whole. Many use this opportunity to realize a dream or live life anew, but, there are also those who use the city as a place to shed the baggage of the past, moulting away memories and events that would otherwise cling uncomfortably to their psyches. In Teju Cole's *Open City*, New York provides Julius with a space where he can lose the parts of himself that he does not care to acknowledge; however, the security provided by the city is fleeting, as Julius discovers that ignoring the darkness of the past cannot ever make it less real.

Thanks to the crowded nature of the city, especially one as populous as New York, it becomes easy to stop observing individual people, as everyone begins to register in the mind as part of a larger organ or some binding agent holding the buildings and streets together. Julius remarks on this isolating effect early on, stating, "Above ground I was with thousands of others in their solitude, but in the subway, standing close to strangers, jostling them and being jostled by them for space and breathing room, all of us reenacting unacknowledged traumas, the solitude intensified," (Cole 7). The jostling of bodies serves as the agitation necessary to push off the unwanted, be it unwanted pasts or human interaction in the present. In "reenacting unacknowledged traumas," (Cole 7) the people in the subway are unconsciously ridding themselves of the traumas, almost shedding them to be left on the floor of the subway car where they can be sent off into the dark of the tunnel never to be seen again.

While this particular circumstance occurred on the subway, Julius spends most of his time walking about the city, an activity that also lends itself to disappearing. In many ways walking makes it even easier to stay secluded, as Julius points out, saying "Walking through busy parts of town meant I laid eyes on more people, hundreds more, thousands even, than I accustomed to seeing in the course of a day, but the impress of these countless faces did nothing to assuage my feelings of isolation; if anything it intensified them," (Cole 6). Such isolation may at first seem to be a unwanted, or perhaps the result of lack of opportunity for Julius. However, Julius is presented with countless chances for social interaction with the faceless mass that surrounds him. The interaction with the African cab driver is a notable example of one such opportunity. After failing to say hello upon entering the car, the driver berates Julius, imploring "Hey, I'm African just like you. Why you do this?" (Cole 40). Julius apologizes, but later admits that he felt no remorse, stating, "I was in no mood for people who tried to lay claims on me," (Cole 40). In this moment, it becomes clear that Julius is not involuntarily isolated. Later interactions, including one with the security guard at the bar, show that Julius is willfully cloistering himself from society, as if personal

interaction will damage the impassive facade he puts up for the world.

Speaking of this facade, Julius spends much of the text establishing his personality as linked different cultural and geographic touchstones. He mentions a love for classical music, a love so intense that he “generally avoided American stations, which had too many commercials for [his] taste,” (Cole 4). This musical gatekeeping, coupled with his casual name dropping of locations around New York and Brussels creates an air of intellectual refinement, which Julius employs to appear sophisticated before others. This interpersonal slight-of-hand allows him to distract others from his true identity with a false one comprised of highbrow intangible carefully arranged to create a sense of superiority. He even goes as far as to disparage his brother’s non academic pursuits, scoffing “He doesn’t understand why the studies are important to me, he has no sense of an intellectual life,” (Cole 125). His intellectualism is also a variety firmly rooted in the left-leaning, cosmopolitan mode of New York academics, which makes sense given that his residency and his connection to people like Professor Saito. He validates his own intellectual credentials with yet more name drops, this time declaring that he “[knows] about Finkelstein, about Noam Chomsky,” (Cole 125-126), in a moment of cliched brain flaunting that takes place in an aside ostensibly about individualism. While the inclination for the highbrow Julius demonstrates may be sincere, it comprises an abnormally large amount of his identity, or at least that portion that is made known to the reader. This reflects a lack of depth to Julius’ character that could be ascribed to his desire not to reveal the parts of his identity he is trying to hide.

Part of the lack of nuance to Julius’ outward persona is at one point ascribed to the natural progression of time’s effect on memory. While discussing the nature of the past and memory, Julius discusses forgetting in considerable detail, remarking, “We experience life as a continuity, and only after it falls away, after it becomes the past, do we see discontinuities. The past, if there is such a thing, is mostly empty space, great expanses of nothing in which significant persons and events float,” (Cole 155). The implication of this passage is that only the significant moments and people from the past remain anchored as memories. At first, this would seem to make sense, as typically those events that are important would also be memorable in the first place. However, the passive drifting of memories into the abyss of time immemorial does not accurately describe which memories remain a part of Julius’ identity and which are lost.

Some memories assert their presence due to their importance or relevance to Julius’ life. This is true in several cases, such as the last time Julius and his mother “had anything like an intimate conversation,” (Cole 80) or moments of important conversation with Professor Saito, who seems to be as much a parent as either of Julius’. Others, however, do not fit the mold of the “falling away” described previously by Julius. Take the small girl for whom Julius develops an intense affection back in Nigeria, who he abruptly recalls as, “That other girl had been hidden in my memory for more than twenty-five years; to suddenly remember her, and to instantly tie her to Nadege, was a shock,” (Cole 60). Such an event is not so much a falling away as it is an awakening,

or the re-emergence of a minor past event through a connection to some stimulus, in this case the sight of Nadege's limp. Under different criteria for remembrance and the relationship between people and their past, this would be perfectly reasonable. However, Julius has previously postulated that memories must be significant and punctuate the empty space of fallen events that break the continuity of one's story. Since the return of this memory is predicated on the external stimulus of observing Nadege's limp, Julius' previous theorem cannot hold.

This contradiction gives rise to the connection between all that has been discussed thus far; the city has provided Julius a space where, absent from the scrutiny of others, his identity may exist in the manner he wishes it to. When it comes to the issue of the sexual assault Julius committed in his youth, it becomes apparent that neither the re-emergence of memory from stimuli, nor Julius' conception of memories falling in the dark shroud of the past is correct.

Moji's heated accusation towards the end of the book is quite revealing, both in terms of what it says about Julius as a person and in terms of how he uses the city as a means to mold his identity in his preferred image. During this passage, she accuses Julius of ignoring the past:

"I don't think you've changed at all Julius. Things don't go away just because you choose to forget them. You forced yourself on me eighteen years ago because you could get away with it, and I suppose you did get away with it. But not in my heart you didn't. And maybe it is not something that you would do today, but then again, I didn't think it was something you'd do back then either. It only needs to happen once" (Cole 245)

Given Julius' previous linking of past memories to current observations, one would think that he would have recalled the rape upon seeing Moji again. The fact that this does not occur reveals that Julius is capable of willfully suppressing memories, just as he does every day after talking with his patients. In forgetting parts of his past at will, Julius is able to reject an uncomfortable reality, thus creating an alternative one in which he serves the only person of concern. The benefit the city confers is that it provides him with the necessary anonymity and isolation to shed his identity properly. As Moji points out, the mere act of forgetting does not change the reality of the situation, and thus in order for the successful rejection of one's past to occur, a space like a city is a necessity. While Moji's accusation is not able to change Julius as a person, it does reveal an important fact about attempting to hide one's past in the expanse of the city. The fact that Moji was able to confront Julius, despite his best efforts to avoid ever recalling this time in his life, indicates that the sanctuary from the past provided by the city is fleeting. Julius' avoidance and erasure of his past was intentional, performed with the purpose of escaping the consequences of actions, despite the fact that his victim had no such option to escape from.

He is not alone in this activity. Consider the case of V., one of Julius' patients who also happens to be a scholar who studies her Native American heritage. She is plagued by her research, which involves sifting through accounts of the brutality towards Native

Americans at the hands of European settlers. Part of the reason for V.'s intense depression has to do with the idea of postmemory, or her experiencing the memories of trauma without ever having been the immediate, intended recipient of said trauma. She confides to Julius:

“I can’t pretend it isn’t about my life...it is my life. It’s a difficult thing to live in a country that has erased your past...There are almost no Native Americans in New York City, and very few in all of the Northeast. It isn’t right that people are not terrified by this because this is a terrifying thing that happened to a vast population. And it’s not in the past, it is still with us today; at least, it’s still with me.” (Cole 26–27).

V.'s experience is much akin to the experience of Moji, in that both were victims of an intense wrong, one an attack on a personal identity, the other on a common identity shared across time. In both cases, the erasure is performed or allowed by those who benefit from it. In Julius' case, he is able to use the city a hideout, an asylum from his own doings, and does so quite successfully for a time. In the case of the brutalization of Native Americans, millions of New Yorkers are able to go about their lives unaware of what transpired on the site of their city, while V. is left to grapple with the destruction of the civilization she would have inherited. They do not see the pain of hundreds of years when they see her amongst the crowd of others.

And yet, the city, for all its energy, its expansiveness, its crowded streets filled with people meant to be seen but not known, can only protect the eraser for so long. Julius' case is indicative of this, but his is not the only example. For a quarter century, Julius omitted the rape he committed from his memory. Moji sees through the defensive facade of Julius “the psychiatrist... the know-it all,” (Cole 244), and marches on his fortified faculties with pained resolve. She knows that there is futility in her attempt to wrestle an answer from him, but she does not care because she knows that her words will break his constructed identity. Julius responds to these events with a Camus anecdote linking Nietzsche with the Roman hero Scaevola in attempt to continue his disinterested intellectual schtick. While this at first appears to be more elitist bluster on the part of Julius, it ends up revealing an important change. At the end of his story, he writes, “I saw that Nietzsche’s contempt for pain had been expressed not with a coal but with several lit matchsticks that he had placed in the center of his palm and that, as they began to burn his hand, an alarmed school yard prefect had knocked to the ground,” (Cole 246). Without knowing it, Julius reveals how Moji’s words have affected him. He was not destroyed by her words, his identity was torched, or perhaps his true self was revealed through the light and pain of the conflagration.

Furthermore, the case of V.'s written account of the colonization of New York serves a similar role to Moji's verbal indictment of Julius. Whereas society at large has forsaken this dark memory of the past, clinging to the image of a modern metropolis in order to direct attention away from what had once existed on the site of today's city, V. is able to resurrect this missing past with her book *The Monster of New Amsterdam*. This comparison is not meant to establish a false equivalency; one cannot treat a rapist and

the descendants of a dark figure from history in the same manner. The similarity exists in that both the modern New Yorker and Julius (who also happens to be a modern New Yorker) have ignored a dark past in order to free themselves from the burden of knowing, and in Julius' case from the burden of responsibility. V.'s work is "pitched to a general readership," (Cole 26); it is meant to be read by that amorphous crowd circulating the streets, so that they may know what ground they walk upon. Her intent is for them to not to become someone like Julius, so that they may avoid complacency through the understanding of their identity and that of others.

The expanse of the city can lend a feeling of safety for those trying to escape their past. It at first seems unreasonable that they may be found in such a large place, however, there comes a time when Julius is stargazing that such an escape is revealed to be impossible. Julius remarks that the true nature of stars "was the persisting visual echo of something that was already in the past," (Cole 256). Even across the infinite void of space, the past eventually catches up, and if the past can find its way to the present across millions of light years, what hope is there for those trying to escape it by crossing a mere city block? The human identity is one that may be adapted to allow its most honest expression, but denying parts of identity because they may inconvenience or upset the individual for the truth they tell about them is a futile task. Julius built a new persona out of collected scraps of refinement, and yet even twenty five years after shedding an event from his past he is still subject to its legacy. As much as one may like to think that destiny is plastic and can be shaped to one's liking, events once passed set like the cement of the sidewalk, a sidewalk that may lie on top of someone else's world. There is no denying what has been done, and despite all the effort to change the past by ignoring, denying it, or hiding amongst the city's people, inevitably the past will find a way to shine down from above, as there is no way to truly hide in an open city. The time to shape one's identity is in the moments before a decision is made, not in the years after spent running from the consequences of said decision.



## TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN KYOTO

by Xinyue Xu

Photos were taken at the same crossroads during my time in Kyoto, Japan this past summer. Each side of the crossroads has a very different view and different representation of the modern and traditional part of the Japanese culture. I hope these photos will provoke deeper thinking into the design and segregation of the urban area around the world, and the importance of the preservation of traditions alongside innovation.

2019







## **BLINDSPOTTING (2018)** **Criminal Justice and Gentrification in Contemporary Film** *by Logan Dreher*

2019

Watching the 2018 film *Blindspotting*, I had the same feeling in my chest as when I started my senior year of high school, just a few weeks after Michael Brown was shot in Ferguson. It felt like that year was haunted by his death and its furious aftermath; as I finished my college applications in November, a grand jury choose not to indict his killer Darren Wilson. Wilson was exonerated again by the Department of Justice report in March, as I anxiously awaited my acceptance letter from Brown. And Baltimore erupted in protest after the death of Freddie Gray, when I was taking final exams and preparing for my graduation in April.

The specter of dead black men hung over my school, where 42% of the student body was black. But the racial politics that ground *Blindspotting* also reminded me of a conversation I overheard between two of my classmates that year. One of the boys had called Michael Brown a thug, said he deserved it, said that was why he always called police “sir” and did what they told him to do. In effect, he was saying what so many wealthy black folks have thought to themselves or remarked in private: they’re my color but not my kind. In response the other boy told him, you acting like ‘cause you got on sperrys and vineyard vines when the KKK rolls through they won’t lynch your ass too.

Both of these boys were young, wealthy black kids trying to make sense of a year punctuated by the violent deaths of black men in the US. And in many ways, the film *Blindspotting* is raising the same questions: how do you make sense of blackness in the US? What does it feel like to be hunted by the police and haunted by dead men who look like you? What are the boundaries of blackness in a country where it is increasingly being defined by racial profiling and police violence?

...

*Blindspotting* is written and co-starred by first time screenwriters Daveed Diggs and Rafael Casal, who grew up in Oakland together and spent nine years developing the film. The premise of the movie is relatively simple: Collin (Diggs) has three days left on probation when, on the way his halfway house, he sees a white police officer shoot a fleeing black man in the back. Increasingly disturbed, Collin tries to stay out of jail as his best friend Miles (Casal) drags him into trouble.

Often breaking into verse, the film is a mediation on the city of Oakland, police brutality, and above all, the friendship between Collin, who is black, and Miles, who is white. *Blindspotting* also depicts the intrusion of the criminal justice systems into the day-to-day lives of black men more eloquently than any movie I have seen. In *Blindspotting*, the carceral state is so much more than the physical space of the prison.

Collin's label as a convicted felon permeates his life. The carceral state is a mindset, a way of relating to the world that Collin internalizes. He knows that he is always one slip, one moment of bad luck away from being sent back to jail. As the head of his halfway house tells him: prove that you are not just a felon at all times.

Collin's relationship to the carceral state dictates the shape of his life. He must memorize the boundaries of Alameda County because he cannot leave it. He has to live in a halfway house and return before his 11pm curfew each night. He cannot find a new apartment because no one wants to rent to a convicted felon. His relationship with his girlfriend, Val, collapsed while he was incarcerated. He cannot risk reporting on the unjust police shooting he witnessed. He cannot move to help when his best friend is in a fight, bloodied and pleading for help because Collin must mediate all of his decisions through the question, "Will this put me back in jail?" The threat of going back to prison immobilizes and silences Collin throughout the film, a silencing made literal in a dream sequence where Collin is chained down in a courtroom, choking up bullets as he tries to yell "Stop!"

But at times, Collin struggles to act because he knows that all of his possible decisions risk sending him back to jail. In one scene, Collin is stopped at a red light on his way back to the halfway house for his 11pm curfew. He knows that if he's late, he risks being written up and being denied parole. The street is deserted, he could run the light. But this too would risk being pulled over and again, denied his freedom. Both options are a dead end. The plot of *Blindspotting* deftly captures the ways in which prisons narrow the range of choices for those within its grasp.

Collin's experience stands in for that of so many black men in the US who feel both claustrophobic and exposed in public spaces. The sharp nose of an idling cop car, the spotlight of their headlights, is enough to raise Collin's heartbeat even when he knows he has done nothing wrong. As he raps, fillin' up with fear / I know you feel it / I've been feelin' it for years / In fact I don't remember ever never feelin' it. Collin's life is defined by his mark as a convicted felon.

Collin's final confrontation with the cop he saw shoot a fleeing black man, the cop who has become the face of the carceral state, is a plea to be seen as human—as complicated, as multi-faceted, as more than his felony. And it is a satisfying moment of a catharsis for a character who has been running scared for the last ninety minutes.

...

*Blindspotting* is also a mediation on the experience of gentrification, of watching the city you grew up in rapidly gentrify around you. The film, which was shot on site in Oakland, turns the long-time residents of the city into another character, a chorus who share an unsettling sense of becoming strangers in their own city.

Though the markers of gentrification are obvious in the movie, and the term itself

ubiquitous in our cultural lexicon, I came away from *Blindspotting* still unsure exactly what gentrification is. In its popular usage, it is commonly understood as the migration of relatively wealthy, white transplants in blighted areas of a city, who bring with them long needed investment but also displace older, poorer, long-term residents with rising rents. In *Blindspotting* Miles, Collin and their friends fit the mold of these older residents, while the hipsters and yuppies the film so often makes fun of the wealthy gentrifiers.

Much of the research broadly corroborates this narrative; a 2015 study out of the University of California Berkeley found that almost all of Oakland was at-risk of or undergoing displacement, as measured by the disappearance of low-income households.<sup>1</sup> And a meta-analysis of research on gentrification agreed that across US cities, “in-movers” to revitalizing neighborhoods tend to be “wealthier, whiter, and of higher educational attainment” while out-movers are more likely to be “renters, poorer, and people of color.”<sup>2</sup> But that same review found it difficult to quantify exactly how often gentrification results the displacement of long term residents.<sup>3</sup> It concluded that there is too much disagreement within the literature about the operational definition of displacement, its timescale, or even what “constitutes a significant effect” in the level of displacement to come to meaningful conclusions about the impact of gentrification.<sup>4</sup> The review also noted that the literature failed to discern if gentrification was driven primarily by the influx of higher-income migrants or by public investment. To make matters more confusing, while gentrification is highly racialized in our cultural imaginary, there have also been accusations of “black gentrification,” in which in-bound middle and upper-class black transplants supposedly priced out poorer white residents.<sup>5</sup>

The state of the literature has left unanswered questions about the fundamental nature of the problem of gentrification. Is the process primarily about the physical changes to the space of the city, the influx of Starbucks and quirky bookstores that replace the bodegas and corner shops? Or is it defined solely by the displacement of long-term residents of an area of the city, who can no longer afford the higher cost of living? Must gentrification be racial in nature, understood as the destruction of communities of color that have long relied on each other, even and especially as the state disinvested in them? Is gentrification even negative?

Alternatively, *Blindspotting* argues that gentrification is a cultural and psychological phenomenon rather than a purely economic one. The film portrays gentrification as an insidious feeling of disposability; in one scene, Collin raps I know I’m just here to help the harvest / After that I’m a target as he clears out an abandoned home whose former inhabitants left behind their wedding album. Gentrification in *Blindspotting*’s Oakland is not just a matter of being pushed out by rising rent prices. Instead, gentrification is a creeping sense that Miles and Collin are unwelcome in their own neighborhoods; that the “transplants” are putting on Oakland’s culture as a fun costume while long-time residents weather worsening state violence; that Oakland is losing its culture to a group of people who would rather Instagram police shootings than work

to end them.

This narrative has struck a chord with so many urban Americans, regardless of the actual statistics around the prevalence of displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods. This feeling, of being left behind and made a stranger in your own home, matters regardless of the empirical evidence. Even if poorer residents of color are not being pushed out of their neighborhoods, the emotional resonance of such a narrative indicates that there is something deeply concerning going on in “revitalizing” US cities. Ubiquitous cultural stories like this signal some kind of dysfunction within a society, even when they are not empirically true. Consider the narrative around undocumented immigrants present among some working-class Americans. Even if it is not quantifiably true that undocumented immigrants are taking the jobs of white Americans, the existence of such a narrative illuminates a problem with the low-skill job market in the US that warrants further investigation and intervention. The prevalence of the cultural narrative of gentrification among urban Americans demands state intervention in the process of urban renewal.<sup>6</sup>

But the understanding of gentrification that *Blindspotting* presents opens a new series of questions. If gentrification is primarily cultural, what makes someone’s use of culture “legitimate?” Who owns Oakland culture, or the culture of any inner-city neighborhood? These are questions that *Blindspotting* is interested in asking as well: who does black culture belong to? What does it mean to be black? What are the boundaries of blackness in a country where it is increasingly defined by proximity to state violence?

The film draws out these questions in the relationship between Miles and Collin. Both Miles and Collin grew up in Oakland. They share a slang, an affect, a performance of Oakland’s cultural identity. Though white, Miles has a black girlfriend and a black son. And throughout the movie, Miles seems intent on a public persona that proves that he is not a transplant. I was struck by the many scenes of Miles putting on and removing his grills as he moved through different social spaces in what seemed like a conscious performance of his cultural identity, an attempt to mark himself as genuinely belonging in Oakland’s historically black community.

But Collin went to jail for an incident of violence that they both participated in. Miles did not. And Miles is not haunted by the shooting death of the young man in the way that Collin is. In his confrontation, Collin tells the cop, You might think you know what’s happening / But you don’t feel it like we / Do—to feel it, it has to be / You—cut you / But you don’t know what the cut do. But like the white cop, Miles does not know what it feels like to be hunted, to be a convicted felon, to be publicly black.

Miles does not have to mediate his behavior in the way that Collin does. He does not have to ask what is safe for a black man to do in public. In one scene, Miles honks and yells at a transplant for blocking in their moving truck with his fancy car as Collin sits passively in the driver’s seat. Afterwards, their company gets a complaint that a

“black guy with dreads” was honking and screaming. As Collin tells Miles later in the film, You are the nigga that they are out here looking for. When Miles throws himself into a fight at a party and shoots a gun into the air in anger, Collin is furious, yelling They going to call the cops and shoot my black ass. Miles never seems worry about what amount of public anger will get him killed or arrested, as Collin clearly has to. In the final confrontation, Collin points to Miles, rapping The one that goin’ dummy never felt the need to run / But I’ve been sprintin’ till I limp across the finish with a gun.

In many circles, it has become somewhat of a cliché to note that race is a social construct, contextually and culturally rather than biologically situated. But what exactly does this mean in *Blindspotting*, when race operates as a cultural affect that Miles and Collin share, and a somatic, bodily difference that they do not? When what truly seems to separate them is that Collin is more likely to be, and indeed has been, targeted by racial profiling and state violence? I am deeply troubled by this understanding of blackness, which seems to locate race within racism. Do we want to define the black American identity by its current proximity to violence and the carceral state? Is this not something that we want to work to end?

I am reminded here again of the two boys in my high school trying to understand aloud the death of Michael Brown and how they fit into it as young black men of a different class position. But the perception that upper-class black men have an entirely separate relationship to the state than poor black men is true. As James Forman Jr. notes in his book *Locking Up Our Own*, the lifetime risk for college-educated Black men decreased at the very same time that it “skyrocketed” for black men who dropped out of high school; the risk of incarceration was 10 times higher for black high school dropouts than for college-educated African Americans by the early 2000s.<sup>7</sup> It probably would take the virulent white nationalist rule of the KKK to reduce wealthy and poor black folks to the same social position as poor African Americans. In this case, how are we to conceptualize a black identity across class?

Blackness has always been a porous identity precisely because it is socially and historically constructed. As Kai M. Green noted in a blogpost on Rachel Dolezal, blackness is a category that people move in and out of, depending on their “complexion, or language, or accent, or hair texture.”<sup>8</sup> Blackness is more and less legible in different circumstances and by different people. Green goes on to say “we do not all carry our history in the flesh. Some of us carry it in our language, some of us carry it in our sway, some of us carry it by proclaiming it.” But, as Green contends, being misread does not make anyone somehow less authentically or genuinely black; blackness cannot be reduced to its legibility by other people. In his blogpost, Green calls on us to consider blackness as not just something that has been done to us or an identity that we do not have a choice in. This call would push *Blindspotting* to reconceptualize the difference between Miles and Collin, to reimagine blackness beyond proximity to state violence. And it pushes all of us to ask what blackness would mean in a world without racial violence and injustice, if it would even exist at all.

Unsurprisingly, the film does not have answers to these questions. But I do not have the answers, either. I do not think we as a society could come up with answers to all of these questions. It was wonderful still to watch *Blindspotting* contend with the boundaries of race, this real and fantastical concept that continues to shape our world.

. . .

Despite the surprising complex racial politics in *Blindspotting*, the movie still elides portrayals of entrenched poverty. This was perhaps the biggest flaw of the film. No character on-screen seems to have any particularly serious concerns about money. Both Miles and Collin work full-time and have comfortable homes, or family members who do. In one scene, Miles is worried about finding money for his son's private school tuition, but he quickly makes that money in the next few minutes of the film. Though the film makes clear the ways in which gentrification and the carceral state are bound up in each other, it does not meaningfully address how both are undergirded by stark economic inequality.

*Blindspotting* seems to be uninterested in depicting the experience of entrenched poverty, instead identifying the carceral state as the most pressing threat to black Americans. Yet poverty, and the violence that comes along with it, are always hovering just at the edges of the film: In the very first scene, Miles buys a gun to protect his family, a decision that his girlfriend intuitively understands. And later, Collin raps of his city We stuck it out / It turned us into some thugs / Got a whole city brand new / Now they kickin' out us. But the violence and state deprivation that supposedly turned Collin into a thug and drove Miles to buy a gun never actually appear.

The community of Oakland is a chorus as Collin and Miles slide in and out of convenience stores, street corners, beauty salons, dapping friends or strangers in greeting. But this chorus of long-time residents never have any conflict with each other; *Blindspotting* portrays them as thoroughly united in the face of intruding gentrifiers. By depicting the horror of a carceral state fueled by gentrification, *Blindspotting* makes a paradise of the old Oakland. The stark differences of the gentrifiers homogenizes and sanitizes the city before gentrification.

In *Blindspotting's* narrative of gentrification, the "real" Oakland is frozen in the period just before widespread gentrification. This genuine Oakland of the cultural imaginary, conjured from the memories long-time residents, freezes the city in a single moment in the 1990s. But cities are dynamic places and Oakland, like all of urban America, constantly changed throughout the twentieth century. Just before the period of gentrification in the 1980s and 90s, Oakland was in the throes of a national crime wave.<sup>9</sup> The violent crime rate in Oakland peaked at a high of over 2,500 incidents per 100,000 residents in 1992.<sup>10</sup> But just eight years later in 2000, the city's violent crime rate had declined by 52%. Narrating this moment in the early 1990s as the "true" Oakland freezes the city in the most violent period of its recent history.

This move reminded me of *Black Panther*, one of the few other mainstream films by and about black people. Like *Blindspotting*, *Black Panther* freezes Africa technologically, culturally in the period before the invaders (in this case European colonial powers.) Despite all of its technology and knowledge, the mythical Wakanda operates under a monarchy, and its military still uses spears, shields, and armored animals in combat. Wakanda is a vision of alternative history—what would have happened if Africa had not been colonized—that constrains its own future by tying “African-ness” to the European understanding of Africa from their encounters in the colonial period. In the same way, *Blindspotting*’s Oakland seems to tie its identity to the moment of cross-cultural contact, when white gentrifiers first moved into the city.

To be clear, one of the strengths of *Blindspotting* is the ways it depicts gentrification as deeply dangerous and disturbing to Collin, Miles, and other characters in the film. But the film also struggles to reflect on how Oakland’s identity was formed, and if long-time resident’s attachment to this identity is a positive thing. The film’s portrayal of gentrification also makes it that much more difficult to understand exactly what gentrification is, or how to craft meaningful solutions to its ill-effects. Many cities in the US, including Oakland, do desperately need reinvestment, an expanded tax base, and the other benefits that gentrification can bring.

Current policy platforms have focused on retaining these community benefits while preventing displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods. Such policy suggestions, which include zoning ordinances and rent control, try to keep rents at reasonable levels and better engage the community in the neighborhood’s development.<sup>11</sup> But would these policy interventions address the pervasive and more subtle discontent that *Blindspotting* presents? How would policy address the feelings of disposability or a perhaps legitimate concern on the part of black residents that they might be subject to more aggressive policing with the influx of wealthier, whiter residents?<sup>12</sup> I do not feel comfortable suggesting that such concerns are unfounded or overblown or throwing up my hands in response. It is unclear how many of the emerging policy solutions to gentrification and displacement would address them. As *Blindspotting* so deftly demonstrates, the breadth of concerns around gentrification demand consideration.





**CAN YOU GENTRIFY A VACANT LOT?****The Jewelry District and the Myth of the American Urban Utopia***by Colin Kent-Daggett*

2019

During a Providence Ordinance Committee hearing this July, opponents of the proposed 46-story Fane Tower framed the project as a referendum on the city's future: would the City Council cave to the whims of a wealthy New Yorker and sacrifice Providence's skyline, along with a \$15 million tax credit? Or would it hold out for a developer willing to respect the existing 100-foot height restriction and ongoing park and pedestrian projects along the Providence River?

Few groups are as opposed to Fane Tower as the Jewelry District Association (JDA). Though the neighborhood—nestled between Johnson & Wales to the north and I-195 to the south—has few residents, the JDA's members are knowledgeable, passionate, and devoted to a well-planned future. The Jewelry District Association's brochure describes its members' utopic vision for their neighborhood: "a rich future in a walkable, bikeable, livable environment that's welcoming for business and residents alike." This mission statement represents the unified vision of planning professionals and scholars of an ideal city. After decades of prioritizing cars, sprawl, and suburbia, American architects and planners have recently rediscovered what many of the world's most romanticized cities have long known—that an active, inviting street makes for a better community—and, with no hint of irony, coined it New Urbanism.

What city planners and the JDA agree upon are obviously worthy goals for a community—knowledge, education, and innovation. More tangibly, walkability, bikeability, mixed-use developments, and riverside parks promote healthy and socially cohesive neighborhoods. The JDA, like any neighborhood association, is right to pressure the city for investments in sustainable, thoughtful, and cohesive additions to its community.

But the aspect rarely considered in debates about Fane Tower, and New Urbanist projects more broadly, is whether the rebranding and rapid redevelopment of one walkable, bikeable neighborhood is a positive for Providence as a whole. A broader investigation into investments in the Jewelry District and the history of the city suggests that the new Jewelry District is an extension of, rather than a cure to, the redlining, urban renewal, and deference to moneyed developers that gutted the neighborhood in the first place.

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In the context of this new vision for American cities, the 2007 relocation of I-195 to the Fox Point hurricane barrier is akin to a modern miracle: huge swaths of completely vacant land, close to the city center. In the Jewelry District, Providence has the opportunity to develop an addition to its downtown core from scratch, and the city is keen to

“leverage all that [it] can and all that [it has] to offer to collectively move Providence forward,” according to Mayor Jorge Elorza in a September press conference.

The walk along Dyer Street from Downtown to the JDA’s September meeting at South Street Landing showcased the incredible transformation taking place in the Jewelry District. The I-195 Redevelopment Commission, responsible for the “sale, marketing, and oversight” of the new land, boasts about the variety of current projects, as a neighborhood that was recently a moonscape of surface parking lots is brimming with construction projects: South Street Landing, a 270,000 square foot office and academic center; the 120,000 square foot Innovation Center, which will house Brown’s School of Professional Studies and the Cambridge Innovation Center; the Johnson & Wales Science and Innovation Center; Chestnut Commons, a mixed-use development with 91 “upscale, urban [as opposed to...?] residential units;” River House, the 174-unit luxury housing development marketed to students; and, of course, Fane Tower.

Though not visible from Dyer Street, a survey of the funding behind these projects reveals that there is big money behind walkability and mixed-use design. Fane Tower, the potential recipient of a \$15 million tax-credit, was proposed by the New York City-based Fane Organization; South Street Landing was developed by CV Properties LLC, a Boston-based commercial real estate firm; the Innovation Center is managed by Wexford Science & Technology, a Baltimore-based firm that develops “Knowledge Communities” and received a \$18.8 million tax incentive; River House is funded by GMH Capital Partners, a Pennsylvania-based real estate firm with \$8 billion of assets and an \$8 million tax credit. In all, these developments represent a massive state and private investment into the new Jewelry District—as the “Innovation & Design District” and Providence’s neighborhood of the future.

Notably, Fane Tower is the only one of these projects not encouraged by the Jewelry District Association. Olin Thompson, a member of the JDA and a Jewelry District resident since 2007, told the College Hill Independent that he and other members support large investments “for the right projects.” But while Thompson asserts that “Fane Tower is out of step with this community and the rest of the city,” a second look at current projects in the Jewelry District shows Fane Tower as just a particularly egregious (and unattractive) example of an otherwise-supported trend: tax credits to wealthy developers and institutions who follow the New Urbanist requirements laid out by the Jewelry District and the I-195 Commission.

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For most of Providence, a model neighborhood is out of reach due to the ruthlessness of previous eras of urban planning. In urban communities of color throughout America, the 20th century brought successive waves of segregation, divestment, and displacement. In Providence, a 1939 Residential Security map rated Wayland Square as the only green zone within 3 miles of the city center, while the majority of Southside and Westside were yellow, or “definitely declining.” The rating system—called

redlining—incorporated housing stock, sales, and “the threat of infiltration of foreign-born, negro, or lower grade population,” and was used by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation to determine mortgage availability. Redlining resulted in an artificial suppression of wealth and stability for a generation of communities of color and impeded long-term investments into their surroundings. In the 1940s and 50s, “slum” clearance and urban renewal came to Providence. Traditionally African American neighborhoods such as Lippitt Hill (now “University Heights”) and West Elmwood were deemed “blighted” and subsequently razed. Finally, the construction of I-195 in the 1950s and ’60s destroyed hundreds of homes and separated the Jewelry District, the Southside, and any neighborhood West of downtown from the city center.

The Jewelry District’s industrial past might appear to disqualify it from this history of persecution and dislocation. But excluding its near-vacancy, the neighborhood’s recent history follows the script of gentrification and displacement. The Jewelry District endured rapid divestment after the collapse of the jewelry industry in the 1970s, followed by the characteristic “pioneers” of gentrifying areas. Bunny Harvey, a painter and professor, bought a loft on Chestnut Street in 1985 to use as her studio when the Jewelry District was still, in her words, “a wasteland.” But like gentrifying neighborhoods around the country, others eventually caught on to the prospect of low rents and open space. According to Frank Muhly, Harvey’s husband, these pioneers—primarily artists, activists, and architects—met for coffee in the refurbished Imperial Knife Company. By the time Harvey and Muhly lived in the space full-time in 2011, a community had emerged. Since then, Thompson described “an influx of successful (as opposed to struggling) artists and an increased demand for residential space” in the wake of “excellent investments in rehab and recently new construction.” And in response to this residential demand has come the Innovation & Design District, luxury student housing, and Fane Tower.

For those not sold on the idea that historical processes of residential displacement can also apply to vacant land in a formerly industrial neighborhood, a look back further into the past may suffice—to when the Jewelry District was not always full of jewelry. Before its industrialization, it was a dense, residential community, primarily home to immigrants. Irish, Poles, and Eastern European Jews moved to the Jewelry District in successive waves before they were displaced by mills producing the textiles, jewelry, and other goods that made Rhode Island prosper. What is now Brown University’s Warren Alpert Medical School, for example, housed the Little Nemo costume jewelry company until the late 1970s and seven individual homes from the earliest maps of Providence through the early 20th century. The Jewelry District is currently in the midst of a similar reinvention, this time being remade in service of tech and biomedical research rather than industry.

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The Jewelry District is one of several examples of this accelerated redevelopment and rebranding in Rhode Island. Providence’s own nickname—the “Creative Capital”—

was born out of a \$100,000 rebranding campaign in 2009, per the Wall Street Journal. Before that came “the Renaissance City” after Providence’s economic resurrection in the 70’s and 80’s. Or take the Dunkin’ Donuts Center, itself built in 1972, where targeted investment turned a declining corner of downtown into a tidy strip of hotels, restaurants, and corporate events when the Convention Center and Omni Hotel were completed in 1993. All of these efforts resulted in Providence being named the only American city in the Wall Street Journal’s “Top Ten Up-and-Coming Travel Destinations in the World,” according to the Convention Center website. The ‘redevelopment’ of Lippitt Hill into University Heights was a similarly calculated effort. Across these various projects, the focus of local government on creating an image of Providence as a modern city worthy of tech and real estate attention becomes clear.

Providence is not alone in its push to attract capital and cater to wealthy investors, and it may not have much choice. As detailed in author and activist Peter Moskowitz’s new book *How to Kill a City*, Detroit, New Orleans, San Francisco, and New York City have all prioritized the development of restrictively expensive, if well-designed, housing and amenities for their well-to-do populations. Moskowitz attributes this shift to an evaporation of a city’s tax base itself due to deindustrialization and white flight. With little industry and fewer middle-class taxpayers, contemporary American cities have been forced to generate income in other ways. Thomas Deller, the Director of Planning and Economic Development in Central Falls, told the Independent that, “Rhode Island’s economics are so bad that if we don’t give tax incentives we get zero development, and if there’s zero development it gets worse.” The solution, according to Deller, lies in more profound economic restructuring.

That restructuring has to start with giving people more stability in their homes. By denying low-income communities of color access to the stability, financial equity, and generational wealth of homeownership, government and real estate developers partnered to create neighborhoods with little control over their surroundings. An organic grocery store or hip coffee shop—both standard markers of a gentrifying community—would be less problematic if their neighbors weren’t acutely susceptible to fluctuations in the housing market. Rent control, vouchers, and public housing projects are all potential remedies that have been largely ignored in favor of building at any cost.

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In the meantime, cities continue to change under the weight of reinvestment. Though different circumstances have pushed Detroit, New Orleans, Providence, and other changing cities to the brink of economic collapse, the effects are largely the same: unchecked investment in luxury housing and amenities that are inaccessible to an area’s most vulnerable residents. The zero-sum reality of investment and land-use means that a luxury apartment building in the Jewelry District negates the possibility of a housing project, a community center, a shelter, or a school. When this choice is repeated citywide, South Providence, West Elmwood, and other neighborhoods on the outside of the new I-195 are never included in the city’s “Renaissance,” its “Creative”

reawakening, or its newest “Innovation and Design” phase. When they are included, the city’s well-to-do—backed by an extreme wealth gap—drive marginalized residents out of their homes.

Whether displacement and rent increases are inevitable consequences of otherwise beneficial economic improvement is beside the point; Providence officials first need to recognize that the principles underpinning the redevelopment of I-195 and the Jewelry District are not the keys to the urban utopia they are imagined to be. Like other chapters in the history of American urban planning, New Urbanism has its flaws. And while bike lanes and parks are, in many ways, better than suburban sprawl, their benefits rarely reach the Providence residents who have suffered time and again from redlining, ‘slum’ clearance, and freeway construction. This broader approach to city planning and economic development is potentially challenging for both planners and residents: it requires accepting that Fane Tower is out of touch not because of its design or its height but because it is luxury, and gifting tax credits to the rich inevitably means not focusing on those most in need of resources. As garish as the proposed Fane Tower is, it is not all that different from other projects in the Jewelry District and projects across the country in its catering to the wealthy.

Jewelry District residents, for their part, welcome the renewed attention to their neighborhood. Muhly told the Independent about the need for more retail and how his neighbors are “desperate for a Whole Foods.” Again, Muhly, Thompson, and the JDA can hardly be blamed for wanting retail and grocery options in their price range as well as for parks, bike paths, and pedestrian safety. The issue lies not with them but with the city and state institutions and agencies content to pour resources into projects of limited benefit in pursuit of a New Urbanist, revenue-generating utopia. While Rhode Island and the City of Providence are certainly strapped for cash, their desperation for tax revenue should not hide the fact that the walkable, bikeable, livable Jewelry District of the future will not be accessible to all.

No part of the neighborhood’s revival exemplifies these divergent outcomes better than the relocation of I-195. For Jewelry District residents like Thompson, the move meant finally becoming “part of the city” after decades of being walled off—the pivotal event in the neighborhood’s redevelopment. But for their neighbors in South Providence, the wall and its noise, pollution, and displacement only moved closer. Rather than relieve Providence from the wrongs of previous urban planners, the redevelopment of the Jewelry District has burdened the same communities with the consequences of another romanticized phase of American urban planning.



## **RECOGNIZING INTERDEPENDENCY IN RESILIENT CITIES** **Crafting an Accurate Urban Environmental Framework** *by Regina Caggiano*

2019

In the face of major impending environmental change, it is imperative now more than ever to address urban stability and the changing nature of the city. There are two consecutive stages of successful sustainability strategizing – firstly, the development of rigorous research methods that authentically model all chains of urban resource usage systems, and secondly the implementation of an individualized resilience plan in accordance with these investigative findings. To craft an effective approach, it is imperative that these interventional processes confront the multitude of interdependent social, ecological and infrastructural mechanisms that define the modern city. It is the multidimensional nature of “resilience” itself that necessitates the intricacy of these mediating configurations, as complicated predicaments call for equally complicated solutions.

In order to conceptualize the full scope of action entailed by effective urban sustainability proposals, one must understand resilience on various scales. Resilience can be broadly defined as “a city’s ability to persevere in the face of emergency,” (Watson). By this definition, a successful intervention both alleviates the ill consequences of emergencies and bolsters the framework of the urban environment in a way that promotes the perseverance of a city’s mission. These terms, however, require further dissection in order to concretely identify threats posed to the health of the city landscape and appropriate responsive operations to those threats. Both emergencies and perseverances can be applied more tangibly to specific social strata in the urban multiplex. At the unit level, there is the individual, whose perseverance status is determined by “the preservation of life and... [contentment]” among citizens (Watson). An emergency to the individual is characterized by the jeopardization of this emotional and physical homeostasis. Conditions or events that reduce resource access, instigate violence, promote psychological stress, etc. all constitute such emergencies that must be addressed in successful resilience strategizing. Expanding this framework to the city-wide scope, perseverance is determined by a municipality’s “capacity to self-organize... [learn] and [adapt]” to rapid external change (Sanchez et al.). This further extends the definition of resilience to incorporate maintenance of structures that protect the city system’s ability to govern effectively and uphold collective order, as well as foster a strong sense of community across the regional social landscape. Furthermore, one must also analyze the city through a lens of interdependency, wherein it exists as an interconnected member of a vast urban resource-sharing network. The extent to which cities are interrelated is frankly astonishing, with vital every-day resources such as electricity, freight and food travelling an average of hundreds to thousands of miles before reaching their usage destination (Ramaswami et al.). Thus, an emergency situation in one city has the potential to initiate a sweeping ripple-effect of adverse conditions in other distant urban spaces. Many intricate chains of interaction must be structurally insulated from upheaval in order for a city to reach true resiliency.



To achieve this, effective sustainability intervention must closely mirror the complexity and organization of resilience theory. In developing the framework that conceptualizes threats to urban stability, Ramaswami et al.'s model of sustainable city analysis draws on and reflects the subdivisional system of resilience philosophy. The SEIS study template compartmentalizes urban resilience-related affairs under three major organizational categories for the purpose of creating analytical groundwork that applies to “[developing] integrative interdisciplinary field research and pedagogy on sustainable city systems” (Ramaswami et al., 808). Here there is a clear focus on cultivating an accurate quantitative picture of the city by acknowledging the prevalence of interrelated structures within cities. The most successful sustainability interventions capture the full complexity of urban spaces by accounting for as many players that could potentially influence resilience outcomes as possible. This is best illustrated through the weaknesses of resilience frameworks that account for a limited number of variables. For example, when examining the city through the frame of urban ecology alone, “infrastructure outside the city” and “upstream embodied energies associated with the material energy flow” are persistently excluded from analyses of urban consumption (Ramaswami et al. 804). These studies essentially ignore the critical concept of transboundaryism in the municipality resource network in their reliance on a naïve purely geographical definition of the city perimeter. A massive radius must be drawn around every center of urban metabolism to fully account for the existence of widespread, interrelated material supply chains depended on by citizens. Breaks in such supply chains are not evaluated in the solely-ecological method of study, and thus resulting sustainability intervention plans would fail to address the potential spread of emergency conditions across a widespread urban network, which would then leak into other urban structures and cause emergency at the city-wide and individual level. A city dependent on this kind of analysis could not achieve true resiliency because its sustainable development methodology remains too non-complex. Furthermore, the same issue presents itself in the analysis of city from the dynamic urban simulation point of view. This school of thought aims to model urbanization by depicting quantitative trends in variables characteristic of the city; however, it tends to overlook players that cannot be quantified, such as “the rich interactions of policy actors with other social actors and with the biophysical system that stimulate change in the policy system” (Ramaswami et al., 805). This oversight has the potential to render these models completely useless in predicting the future landscape of cities, as sociopolitical climate is a defining trait of individual urban environments and maintains a sweeping effect on all studied sustainability-related variables. Reliable resilience plans also cannot be drawn up from this mode of investigation, because unlike the SEIS model, it fails to consider all major sustainability players acting within the urban environment.

Ultimately, the most successful urban sustainability models arise from a deep, multifaceted understanding of what resilience is and how to preserve it. No discussion is more timely for the survival of the modern American city. We stand on the brink of an era of utter environmental transformation, and cities must be prepared to absorb systemic shock after systemic shock in order to maintain modern human civilization.

# GENTRIFICATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN EAST AUSTIN

## Race, Policing, and Gentrification in Urban Spaces

by Sara Alisa Hoban

### *Introduction and Key Terms*

This paper explores the influence of gentrification on political participation in East Austin. The term gentrification used throughout the paper can be defined as the profit-driven racial and class reconfiguration of urban communities of color that have suffered from a history of disinvestment and abandonment.<sup>1</sup> The issues of institutional racism discussed throughout the paper are based on the idea that institutional racism consists of the policies, programs and practices of public and private institutions that result in greater rates of poverty, dispossession, criminalization, illness, and ultimately mortality of people of color.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, for the purpose of this discussion displacement is defined as the out-migration of low-income people and people of color from their existing homes and neighborhoods due to social, economic, or environmental conditions that make their neighborhoods uninhabitable or unaffordable.<sup>3</sup> Another key term is “urban renewal” which will be used to mean the use of federal funds by local redevelopment agencies to demolish and redevelop entire sections of neighborhoods based on their “blighted condition.”<sup>4</sup> These terms will be used to discuss the history of segregation in Austin and the factors that have contributed to the rapid gentrification of communities of color in East Austin. I will discuss the effects of gentrification on political participation broadly and in the specific context of the increased threats to political rights that exist in Austin. Finally, I will explore the work that is being done by community leaders and organizations to mitigate the harms of gentrification on political participation in Austin.

### *Background: A History of Segregation in Austin*

In their final report published in March of 2017, Austin’s Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities stated that policies implemented throughout Austin’s history are “explicitly racially discriminatory... [and] laws, ordinances, and city planning were directly responsible for the segregation and gentrification driven displacement we witness today.” One such policy is the 1928 city plan which played a major role in segregating the city; the recommendations that were implemented designated a “Negro District” by means of restricting access to public services west of what is now Interstate-35.<sup>5</sup> This policy paved the way for future discriminatory practices that restricted the rights of low-income communities of color.

In the following years practices such as redlining, or refusing to issue loans because individuals are determined to be a financial risk, kept communities of color from accumulating wealth in the form of homeownership throughout the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> The Home Owners Loan Cooperation denied government backed mortgages in the areas of Austin categorized as “hazardous” which clearly overlapped with concentrations of commu-

nities of color. These same districts fell subject to the Industrial Development Plan implemented in 1957 which zoned all property in East Austin as “industrial.” This meant that the majority of polluting industries were developed in East Austin neighborhoods. Ultimately, the presence of these industries in conjunction with the inaccessibility of loans made it nearly impossible for residents to keep up with deteriorated homes and thus established a foundation for gentrification.<sup>7</sup>

The pattern of discrimination against communities of color in Austin follows that of a general trend: the “one-two” knock out of urban communities of color.<sup>8</sup> This trend consists of the isolation and decreased property value of minority neighborhoods followed by urban renewal and the displacement of the communities by upper-middle class residents.<sup>9</sup> “Urban Removal,” a renaming of the practice of urban renewal that existed in Austin throughout the 1950s, displaced people of color from residential areas that were bought by real estate developers.<sup>10</sup> As a result of urban renewal and affordable property values, white middle class residents moved back into neighborhoods and displaced families who could no longer afford the increased cost of living.

The 1940–1970s in Austin reflected the one-two knockout: white flight, purposeful constraints on homeownership, and deed restrictions resulted in the isolation and concentration of African American and Latinx populations in East Austin followed by the displacement of communities once areas were deemed worthy of housing white-middle class families.

### *Factors of Gentrification*

In January of 2017 Austin Mayor Steve Adler identified gentrification as a key issue facing Austinites. He explained that unless we take action now “we’ll end up with more traffic, higher rents and taxes, endangered neighborhoods, and turbo-charged gentrification.”<sup>11</sup> Austin was ranked the fastest growing city in the United States in 2016 with between 100–150 people moving to Austin per day; it is the 4th largest city in Texas, the 11th most populous city in the United States and has one of the highest rates of income segregation in the country.<sup>12</sup>

In attempting to address issues facing the community, Austin’s Local Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities interviewed focus groups of community members who have personally experienced the forces of institutional racism and gentrification. All of these community members were low-income and nearly all of them were people of color. Each of those interviewed expressed the detriment caused by rapidly increasing property values and their fight to remain in homes that have belonged to their families for generations. The median home price in Austin dramatically increased by 97.1% between 2000 and 2015 from \$152,600 to \$299,300.<sup>13</sup> The impact of rising property taxes has had a significant influence on the communities that make up the Austin area.

The racial and ethnic demographics of Austin, according to the United States Census

Bureau in 2010, were recorded as follows: 48.7% Anglo (Non-Hispanic White), 35.1% Hispanic or Latino, 8.1% African American, 6.3% Asian, and 3.4% other. Each of these demographics is experiencing a change in their share of the population as time moves forward. The Hispanic population in Austin is predicted to continue growing over the next decade. The Asian population in Austin has doubled every ten years for the past three decades and is predicted to take up a larger percentage if the population than African Americans in the next census.<sup>14</sup> African Americans are the sole demographic in decline as the city population has increased; the African American population in the 90s was at 15% and is projected decrease to 5% in the next five years.<sup>15</sup>

Another demographic transition that has influenced the pace of gentrification is the declining number of families with children in the urban core of Austin. The absolute number of children in Austin is increasing along with the rapid population growth but the actual percentage of families with children in Austin is decreasing, especially in downtown. With the growing tech industry (13.3% of jobs are “computer and mathematical” compared to the national average of 6.4% tech jobs) Austin has seen a rise in young professionals moving into the downtown area.<sup>16</sup> This shift influences policy and the ability of the Austin Independent School District to garner community support. The urban core of Austin included 32% families with children in 1970 and dropped to just 14% in 2000.<sup>17</sup> Austin’s local NPR station interviewed Ryan Robinson, Austin’s demographer, about this topic in 2008; he stated that the “urban core has become so much more expensive...not only do you have a socio-economic shift, but along with that you get a racial pattern as well.”

The consequences of increased cost of living in the urban core has affected East Austin communities in the form displacing former communities of color. KLRU, a local PBS news network, described how the geographical convenience of East Austin, with its close proximity to downtown and still-affordable property, have led to gentrification. “Economics are starting to reduce the ability of indigenous families to maintain their stand in Central East Austin. White families and business are becoming downright popular.”<sup>18</sup> The Austin area has one of the highest rates of income segregation in the country; with the lack of a middle class presence in the urban core it limits the ability of low-income residents and youth to “climb the income ladder” and build a better future for their communities.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time that cost of living rates are increasing in the urban center and while upper middle income individuals are invading East Austin, there has been a trend of the wealthiest residents migrating from downtown to the hills west of the city. These transitions have had effects on the community: “the dichotomy [between those invading and those abandoning] has played out in significant ways, like making Austin more politically divided.”<sup>20</sup> A major effect of the increased cost of living throughout Austin has been the separation of the members of community organizations and a change in those who participate politically. The increased separation of communities based on socioeconomic status has influenced the election of local representatives and policy formation.

*Research on Gentrification as it is Related to Political Participation*

Gentrification has many detrimental effects related to the displacement of communities; one of these harms is the idea of “political displacement” or the loss of political voice among long-term residents due to neighborhood change.<sup>21</sup> The political effects of gentrification are especially influential on the local level. Political affiliation is often associated with racial and socioeconomic lines, and thus the displacement of low-income households of color by upper middle class white individuals has had effects on the political representation of communities.<sup>22</sup>

There is some evidence to suggest that politicians cater to the voices of wealthier residents in attempts to increase their tax base and improve the economy.<sup>23</sup> Coded terms like “urban renewal” and “revitalization” are used by policymakers to justify the displacement of communities by upper-class residents who raise property values at the cost of displacing working class families. Additional research has been done regarding the influence of income on political participation; economic problems have been found to inhibit individual’s ability to be involved in politics and result in greater opportunity costs of political participation.<sup>24</sup> Elected representatives’ increased likelihood to cater to wealthy resident’s needs and the fact that low-income communities face barriers to political participation are only compounded by the impact of gentrification in neighborhoods.

Voter efficacy also plays a major role in rates of political participation. There is research that suggests that minority office-holding can improve perceptions of trust in government and builds higher rates of political participation in minority communities.<sup>25</sup> Representatives which accurately reflect their constituencies are more likely to have increased community-wide support and encourage political participation in the future.

A study that analyzed the impact of gentrification with the goal of determining whether it mobilized or destabilized political participation found that gentrification decreases voter turnout among longstanding residents of communities. Research indicated that there were significant negative impacts on voter turnout among longstanding residents in highly gentrified neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup> The study pointed out that “[a]lthough newly constructed and revitalized houses have aesthetic appeal and generate additional tax revenues for city coffers, the revitalization process does have social and political consequences as well.”<sup>27</sup> The negative effects of gentrification, especially in regards to political action and policy making, are known to be mitigated by maintaining local community-oriented organizations and by breaking down obstacles to political participation for low-income communities of color.<sup>28</sup>

*The Politics of Voting: What’s at Stake for Austin Residents?*

Voting policies have been a topic of controversy in Texas for a number of years. Shortly

after the Supreme Court struck down a provision in the Voting Rights Act which required TX to receive federal approval prior to implementing changes to voting policies, former Attorney General Eric Holder led the Department of Justice in filing a federal case against Texas in order to regulate unfair voting practices. This is one example of many that indicates the need for action against discriminatory voting policies that have taken place throughout Texas. Voter id laws, which require official id to participate politically, have repeatedly been ruled as a discriminatory practice by local and federal courts. A local Austin news network KXAN reported in early April that “a judge again ruled that republican lawmakers purposefully designed a strict voter ID law to disadvantage minorities and effectively dampen their growing electoral power.”<sup>29</sup>

In addition to discriminatory voter ID policies, Texas is among the most gerrymandered states in the nation. A federal court ruled in March of 2011 that republicans racially gerrymandered congressional districts during the passage of voter ID laws.<sup>30</sup> The image on the following page represents the congressional voting districts in 2013 – 2014 (the year that former attorney general Eric Holder filed a case against TX for unfair voting practices).<sup>31</sup> The image clearly depicts the partisan drawing of voting districts in order to separate and dilute the power of community voices. Texas’ largest metropolitan areas are partitioned in seemingly inexplicable ways, yet in February of 2017 Trump reversed the federal position on voter ID and districting laws in TX, stating that the DOJ would not pursue the challenges to the state that were made under Obama’s administration.<sup>32</sup>

In response to Holder’s assessment that TX voting policies were prejudiced and discriminatory, Texas U.S. Senator John Cornyn declared that Holder’s stance on the issue had partisan motivations. Cornyn is quoted by the Austin American Statement saying that “according to the U.S. Census Bureau report, 68.2% of registered Hispanic voters in Texas went to the polls in the 2000 general election...that rate rose to 71.2 percent [in 2012]...and over 86% of African American voters participated in the 2012 elections.” What this statement doesn’t account for is the fact that there are far fewer registered Hispanic and African American voters in comparison to their share of the Texas population.

In Travis County, where Austin is located, over 50% of the Hispanic voting age population did not register to vote in the 2016 election, and nearly 45% of African Americans were not registered as well. This number compares to only 23% of the white voting-age citizenry not registered to vote. Despite the fact that there are seemingly high percentages of political participation through casting a ballot, as stated by Senator Cornyn, these statistics hide behind the measure of those already past the barrier of registering to vote. These statements cloud the fact that political participation by the Hispanic community as a whole was the lowest in comparison to all other demographics even though they constitute the second largest demographic in the region.<sup>33</sup> The effects of voter id laws and gerrymandering are especially relevant to communities as Austin faces the effects of gentrification. Even if there are increased rates of voting by those registered to vote, it does not mean that residents’ voices are being heard.

The needs of longstanding residents of neighborhoods affected by gentrification are often overshadowed by the upper-middle class residents that displace members of the community. In a poll investigating low voter turnout in Austin it was stated that the main reason people don't turn out to vote is because they are too busy or have a conflicting work schedule; the second highest reason was because voters felt that their vote didn't matter. When there are already high barriers to entry, such as strict voter id laws and high opportunity costs, and voter efficacy is low because of gerrymandered districts, then the destabilizing effects gentrification all but silence the political voices of low-income communities.

*Actions to Address Gentrification and to Improve Political Participation*

As stated previously, Austin Mayor Steve Adler identified gentrification as an issue that is at the forefront of the policy agenda. He is advocating for a “code re-write” which will help “increase mobility, hold down housing prices, protect the character of our neighborhoods, and address gentrification in an equitable manner.”<sup>34</sup> In addressing the issues surrounding gentrification, studies have cited that community action has been a key way in which communities have fought against political destabilization and political displacement.<sup>35</sup> Austin has made a concerted effort to face the problem of gentrification through the work of local community leaders and organizations. These efforts have played out in several key ways: the implementation of an expanding single-member-district initiative, the creation of a task force on institutional racism and systemic inequities, and the mobilization of community led political action organizations to preserve community and culture.

For many years Austin elected its city council by a citywide vote which involved individuals voting for representatives of the city as a whole instead of their district or neighborhood. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century and the early 2000s over half of the elected city council members and fifteen of seventeen mayors were from four zip codes located in West Austin which are home to less than a tenth of the city's population and house its wealthiest residents.<sup>36</sup> The system was finally changed at the end of 2014 when, after 6 failed attempts, a single-member-district ballot initiative was passed.

This new 10-1 initiative (ten districts and one mayor) was instituted as a means of diversifying the council and attempting to make it more representative. Leadership Austin, a local nonprofit in partnership with The Moody School of Communication at UT Austin, interviewed almost 200 community members ranging from all 10 districts to understand the effects of Austin's new system of geographic representation. One resident from district 3 (in East Austin) expressed that their “district definitely embraced the [transition]. 10-1 was a huge benefit for areas east of I-35 that have traditionally been underrepresented.”<sup>37</sup> The report detailing the general consensus on the 10-1 system expressed a “cautious optimism about the promise of Austin's new 10-1 system to improve the representativeness and responsiveness of city government... [along with the sense that] additional changes need to be put in place to realize 10-

1's promise." The newly elected city council is more diverse than past councils with three latinx members, one African American member, and seven women members. Additionally, at the same time this initiative passed a proposition to move elections to November to coincide with state and federal elections passed as well. Voter turnout has indeed increased in the elections following these initiatives.<sup>38</sup>

Another political initiative at the local level which has been integral in addressing the underrepresentation of communities of color throughout Austin has been the creation of a Local Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities. The Task Force, partially created in response to "police use-of-force cases," is co-chaired by AISD Superintendent Paul Cruz, and Huston Tillotson University President Collette Burnette; it includes five subcommittee groups made up of local leaders to investigate disparities in criminal and civil justice; education; health; finance, banking and industry; and real estate and housing. The Task Force released a report in March of 2017 with a lengthy list of policy recommendations in each of the areas. A few of the many recommendations include: details to improve minority representation in hiring practices throughout Austin, the development of a local dedicated fund to carry out a comprehensive program to redress institutional racism in Austin real estate and housing, and steps to improve access to financial services and to target predatory lending and saving practices. In creating a task force, with the inclusion of over 100 community members dedicated to the different subcommittee groups, there is hope that the practices which negatively affect low-income communities of color will finally be addressed. The committee states that "it is our fervent hope... for the community to garner the political will and resources necessary to move from talk to action."

Another key way that communities are fighting gentrification and promoting political participation is through the creation and action of community organizations. The Black Citizens Task Force, the Central East Austin Community Organization, El Concilio de East Town Lake Citizens, Las Mujeres de East Austin, Save Our Neighborhoods Inc., and United East Austin Coalition are just a few of the most active community led organizations with the goal of engaging community members in policy making and implementation. These organizations have organized events ranging from shuttling residents to the voting booth on Election Day, to town halls, and "Meet Your Representative Day." The work that these organizations do is critical in amplifying the voices of their communities. East side "community activists" are everyday residents and families who are fighting for their right to have their voices heard and represented.

### *Conclusion*

Important work is being done throughout Austin to move towards a more inclusive and representative city. Gentrification and the consequences of a history of systemic racism and of political displacement are critical issues which will affect residents as the population size and demographics of Austin continue to change; the political displacement of residents through gentrification is intensified in Austin because of already high barriers to accessing voting and low levels of voter efficacy that exist.



Preserving the communities, culture, and the rights of low- income residents through fair representation and the work of community advocates will continue to be an important and powerful way of mitigating the harms of the gentrification.

## THE EXTINCT ART OF GUASTAVINO VAULTING

### The Beauty of the Tile Arch System

by *Matthew Stapleton*

2019

Municipal structures with decorative and open spaces began to get commissioned in growing cities during the late nineteenth century following a demand for new architectural properties. Traits such as fireproofing, innovative technological practices, and incorporation of artistic elements were sought out by developers. These large gathering places used by the public included venues such as libraries, restaurants, and courthouses that needed to be built for longevity and tenure. During the same period, master builder and architect Rafael Guastavino immigrated from Spain to New York City in February of 1881 in search of new opportunities. Although he was unable to speak English and was unfamiliar with American building practices, Guastavino had perfected a style of masonry that would eventually become a breakthrough in structural engineering. As described in the *New York Times*, “their vaults and domes – thin, lightweight shells — could be used to span long and short distances efficiently and beautifully. No extra ornamentation was needed for their sensuous convex forms, usually created in a herringbone pattern of cream – or pastel-colored tiles.<sup>1</sup> His patented technique of Guastavino Vaulting, also known as the Tile Arch System, was a new revolutionary form of construction introduced to North America.

Thousands of famous buildings in the United States feature these intricate yet robust arches such as the Boston Public Library, Grand Central Terminal, and New York City subway stations. Despite the new development, the process of laying thin tiles for self-supporting arches only persisted through the 1950’s, where it became desolate after Rafael Guastavino Jr’s death. A shift in architectural style during the mid-twentieth century caused the use of Guastavino Tiles to become a lost art. This eventually became a more historical style rather than modern at a time when builders wanted to use concrete and steel rather than brick and mortar. Though the technique was labor intensive, the process was quick and required minimal support while building the arches and vaults. This was ideal for municipal buildings in urban environments, where high construction costs could be paid for by city funding. The Guastavino’s were far ahead of their counterparts and made significant advances in the fields of masonry, construction, and engineering.

The beginning of the Tile Arch System is debated widely by historians because the technique can’t be traced back to its direct origin. There is speculation that the technology was used by the Moors in Northern Africa in the fourteenth century, while others suggest that it started in Rome and traveled throughout the region to countries such as France, Portugal, and Columbia. “Tile vaulting was in essence a Mediterranean tradition, with its earliest known origins in Valencia. In 1382, the Aragonese king Peter IV (1319– 87) wrote a letter requesting that masons from his court in Zaragoza travel south to Valencia to learn an exciting new vaulting technique recently discovered there. This is the first known reference to a revolutionary tile vaulting method that

developed in the Mediterranean region and eventually spread around the world.”<sup>2</sup> The area where this style had the greatest influence was in Catalonia and Valencia, where it became a focal point for Spanish architects. As a result, the particular curve that is formed is described as a Catalan Arch, a familiar term seen through the works of Gaudi, Cadafalch, and Guastavino.

Rafael was fortunate enough to receive a strong educational foundation from the master construction and development university in Barcelona. The school had elite professors that trained some of the best Spanish Architects during their generation, which significantly impacted Guastavino’s future as a developer due to the rigorous curriculum that he was exposed to. The students were focused primarily on mathematics and physics, stressing the calculations used to determine materials needed for structural compliance. As a traditional architect would learn about using ornament and detail to characterize a façade, Guastavino was trained to honor the integrity of the building before all else. Being well versed in mechanics and load-bearing forms influenced Rafael into the art of masonry, which he used extensively throughout his career. Upon graduation, Guastavino began to build large-scale buildings in Barcelona while still in his mid-twenties. After gaining traction as a top-tiered builder in Barcelona for his construction of the Batlló Factory and La Massa Theater, Guastavino made the drastic decision to immigrate with his son to North America.

Upon arriving in New York City, Rafael didn’t know how to speak English and had trouble establishing a profession as an architect. He was not familiar with the American style and materials used in these urban environments. Professor of Architecture at MIT Dr. John Oschendorf suspects that Rafael Sr. made the trip for many different reasons to include access to Portland cement, desire for city expansion, and potential marital problems. Rafael Sr. started strictly as an architect and built townhouses in New York City which gave him some smaller scale work to get by. A few years later, Guastavino became to build a name for himself after publishing his first book, *The Theory and History of Cohesive Construction*. The write-up focused primarily on the application of the timbrel vault and was renowned by the architectural community for its potential use. He was then invited as a guest lecturer at MIT and the Congress of Architects at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, prompting the prestigious architectural firm McKim, Mead & White to begin conversing with Rafael Guastavino. Shortly after, Rafael Sr. partnered with the firm to start construction on the Boston Public Library, his first major commission in the United States.

The location chosen for the Boston Public Library was well thought out, as Copley Plaza is one of the most vibrant and lively spaces in the city. The city designers wanted the library to be a grand and desirable hub for citizens to travel to for knowledge and wisdom. Guastavino joined the Boston Public Library project almost a year after the groundbreaking ceremony, it is still unclear how he collaborated with such a reputable firm chosen for the commission and gained their trust. It is important to investigate how this happened because the Boston Public Library project was Guastavino’s original display of his masonry in a large urban American environment. The most probable

theory that has been proposed suggests that he was sought out for his ability to fire-proof a structure. “Guastavino’s involvement with the library was a result of his entry in the competition held by the trustees. The trustees may have been impressed by his unique fireproof structural system, although not taken with his architectural design. Even if they did like his plans, they may have chosen McKim as their architect for his reputation and to call greater attention to their new building. In this case, the trustees would have introduced Guastavino and his system to McKim.”<sup>3</sup> The trustees may have seen Rafael Sr.’s lack of architectural style but later they were sold on his century old Spanish method to build one of the greatest libraries in the world.

An epidemic that was occurring in the late nineteenth-century were mass fires that wiped out streets and entire neighborhoods. “The Chicago fire of 1871 destroyed six square miles of the city (19,000 buildings) and the Boston fire of 1872 took down over 700 buildings.”<sup>4</sup> Another important factor to recall is the twenty-four patents Rafael Guastavino filed for upon the immigrating to the United States.<sup>5</sup> These patents made Guastavino very marketable when masonry and construction mended together cohesively to solve structural problems that architects were having at the time. The patents protected his rights on many different applications such as stairwells, domes, floors, arches, fireproofing, etc.

The library featured seven different styles of arches featured by Guastavino which demonstrated his depth of knowledge and formwork when laying and supporting thin layered tiles. The most notable room in the library is Bates Hall featuring a coffered ceiling within a catena-arched barrel vault. The ambiance in the evening is set with the dimly lit green overhead lamps hanging above every table. A narrow walkway is placed in the center of the hall that leads directly to one of the featured half domes. The tiles used in the project were a major issue of debate between the architectural firm and the trustee board due to price and stability. Rafael Sr. was a big advocate for Spanish glazed tiles because that was what he was trained to work with. He had problems convincing the trustees of the library project to award funding for these special tiles because they appeared to focus more on ornament rather than structural integrity. “Guastavino proposed using flat glazed tiles from Spain. He assured the Trustees that it was exactly the qualities they were troubled by, the thinness, lightness and quality of clay, that make them well adapted to their use. Guastavino closes this letter to the Trustees by telling them that he thinks under the current situation, using any tiles but these would be a great loss of time and money.”<sup>6</sup> This long debate with the trustees and a shortage of tiles on the building site influenced Rafael Sr. to open his own tile manufacturing site in Woburn, MA during 1900. This would prevent any funding or supply issues because the glazed tiles had so many unique characteristics. Four years after the library commission, renowned firm Heins & Lafarge utilized Guastavino’s method to construct the New York City subway station at City Hall.

Referred to as a the “Mona Lisa of subway stations” or “an underground cathedral,”<sup>7</sup> beneath the busy New York City streets lies a quiet and abandoned subway platform. The City Hall subway station was last used by commuters in 1945 and features its lack



*Boston Public Library Construction, 1889 (Source: Boston*

of straight lines, skylights, and colorful glazed tile ceilings and walls. “Heins & LaFarge designed elegant, simple stations, influenced by art nouveau and incorporating many details such as the columns and terracotta tiling they had used at the zoo. But the best work was reserved for City Hall. Here they constructed vaulted ceilings, using a technique invented in New York by the Spanish architect Rafael Guastavino which allowed tiles to follow the curve of a vault, arches, wrought iron and many panes of glass”<sup>8</sup> Being able to work in tandem with Heins & LaFarge was another major accomplishment for the Valencian mason following his work in Boston at yet another urban site. “The expansion of the firm’s work into infrastructure projects can be attributed in part to the City Beautiful movement, which reached its peak in the early 1900s, in tandem with the rise of Beaux-Arts civic architecture. The term “city beautiful” was popularized by planner Carles Mulford Ronbinson. In this context subway stations and the undersides of bridges could be transformed into civic art.”<sup>9</sup> This seamless transition into city and state projects was ideal for Rafael and his son as they were not architects by trade, rather construction designers and masons.

City planners began to trust the integrity and capabilities of the Guastavino system after these major commissions. Prior to his entry into the large-scale construction industry, many Americans doubted that the vaults would be able to hold a significant load. The work does not require scaffolding or beams to hold up bricks in place which appears strange at first sight. The reality is that these workers are highly experienced tile layers that are under the direction of a world renowned Spanish master mason. Some of Guastavino’s archived sketches of his domes and arches show how technically advanced he was with concepts such as trust, tension, and compression. “It uses

less material and consumes less energy while producing a structure that is cheaper, easier to install, and of much less weight than most other structures. Its enormous stability stems from two major factors: the convergence of the bricks and mortar into a homogenous, monolithic material that can absorb both compression and tension and the thin (single or double) curved surfaces that gain additional strength by distributing loads sideways, as well as downwards. The vaults produce only minimal lateral thrust.”<sup>10</sup> The low amounts of lateral thrust exerted onto the structures was boasted by Guastavino as well because this implies that walls or supports don’t need to be as thick, thus leading to lower costs for construction. The basis of a dome or vault is that there is a high amount of compression and minimal tension. The tension traditionally pushes the momentum of the bricks held together in a horizontal fashion, but the Guastavino system counteracts this phenomenon. The domes and vaults progress at a very slow and gradual curve which results in the compression of the bricks bearing a stronger force than the tension. A Guastavino tile is three times as thick as a traditional brick (Figure 4), and a vault using this system has never caved in or split. A style that has been used for over a century without a fault shows the reliability of the system and technique more so than the purity of materials used.

Being able to work with well-established firms while running their own tile manufacturing and fireproof construction company proved well for the Guastavino’s. By establishing these partnerships, universities and researchers took note of the new technology they have brought from Spain. Harvard physicist Wallace Clement Sabine, the founder of architectural acoustics, was intrigued with the family’s work on domes, halls, and tunnels. Rafael Sr. had attempted to start this new venture within his construction company, but the acoustic tile industry was advanced by Rafael Jr. who collaborated closely with Sabine. The two patented different types of tiles based on porous materials and their percentage of absorption of sound. This market boosted Guastavino & Co. revenue significantly, as the acoustic architectural form was needed in noise boosting or deafening structures such as subway tunnels, churches, and symphony halls. “The object of my invention is to devise a cohesive ceiling-floor which shall possess great strength conjointly with lightness and which shall also be absolutely fire-proof ... and the peculiar construction of which will give to the finished structure the quality of self- deafening, whereby noises originating in any one story of the building in which my invention is embodied are prevented from being communicated to the stories above or below.”<sup>11</sup> The first type of tile produced by Wallace and Guastavino was kiln fired Rumford tile which was composed of clay, feldspar, and other organic materials. The duo worked for two years to create the Rumford tile which absorbed six times as much noise as a traditional Guastavino ceramic tile.

Eventually the fireproof construction company noticed that the price of production and time that came with Rumford tiles were too arduous. This prompted Rafael Jr. to reach out to the Harvard physicist again to come up with an alternative solution. Starting in 1911, the two worked tirelessly to come up with a better tile that was cheaper, more absorbent, and could stay rigid and maintain form under high heat (used in production process). The result was the Akoustolith tile which went on to be used in famous

structures such as Buffalo Central Terminal and the Princeton University chapel (Figure 5). This type of tile was a drastic improvement in relation to the Rumford tile, the most important change was within the kiln-firing formation. Heating the Rumford tiles by a kiln fire process meant that every tile was different due to how much heat it was exposed to in the process. This resulted in different sound absorption coefficients for every tile, whereas the Akoustolith pieces were non-ceramic so it didn't need to be heated. A surprising function of Akoustolith tiles were that they articulate speech by limiting reverberation and focusing sounds in different octets. Since the tiles could both absorb unnecessary sound and could amplify human speech (most individuals are below the C octet), the product was in high demand. Years later, the public announcement system was created and replaced the function of Akoustolith tiles for structures that needed sound projection like a priest giving a sermon in a large church. Rafael Jr. and Wallace pioneered a new subset of architecture where sound and materials became a part of a buildings character, a truly new and innovative concept. The Guastavino's advertised the function of this product heavily in the 1920's and 1930's while still trying to maintain a strong number of commissions because masonry and tile work were on the decline in the United States.

Rafael Jr. was able to keep the company functioning until his death in 1950, but the style was still used with the final project ending twelve years later. "The company remained in business until 1962 but was in decline during its last two decades. Prof. George Collins cites the increase in the cost of hand labor and the rise of the use of concrete for shell construction as two factors in the company's demise. With the liquidation of the R. Guastavino Company, the use of thin-tile vaulting, by whatever name, ceased in the United States; no company has offered it since."<sup>12</sup> The mass market for concrete drove out this vintage and intricate form that combined elements of beauty, structural perfection, and functionality. Some of the company's greatest works were demolished, never taking into account the amount of time and historical importance a structure like this holds within its walls. Columbia University professor George Collins fortunately revived the research and study into the company before all historical traces were lost with time. With his passing in 1993, a colleague of Collins, professor John Oschendorf at MIT has continued the search and identification of Guastavino's lost buildings. Oschendorf recalls visiting multiple structures in Barcelona and asking the workers if they knew it was an original Guastavino design, which almost all would reply "we don't know who that is." Oschendorf has recently established the Guastavino Project at MIT that builds replica models and maintains a collection of archives for related material. MIT graduate and PhD students that have Oschendorf as an advisor learn about the art in depth, in hopes that the legacy will be carried onward. The students work with tenured masons and mathematicians to learn the mechanics of this impeccable art form. It is natural that Collins and Oschendorf continued the study of this family as their work stemmed from NYC and Boston during the Beaux-Arts movement in these urban cities. As professor Dietrich Neumann stated, "It was, and still is, one of the most elegant and sophisticated methods to cover a space or to vault a room."<sup>13</sup> Guastavino vaulting will remain as one of the most visually appealing yet mechanically sound forms of art and structure that transformed urban architecture.



City Hall Station (Source: Wikimedia Commons)





## SCENES FROM SAINT PAULI

### Street Art as Protest, Commentary, and Community

by Rose Carillo

2019

Saint Pauli's vibrant streetscape boasts bright colors and bold fonts— the neighborhood's famed graffiti is unmissable. For the long-time residents of Hamburg's "hippest" area, the process of gentrification, too, is impossible to ignore. The melding of carefully constructed marks, lines, and shapes communicate strong sentiments to gentrifiers and to the increased police presence that follows. Beyond the apparition of a Carhartt store or an artisanal coffee shop is the stealthy and unforgiving destruction of social networks, cultural disruption, and an affordable housing crisis. Once home to the working class and to a tough reputation, the neighborhood has gone from one of the poorest districts in all of Germany to Hamburg's richest.



*Police patrol a recently constructed, expensive waterfront development. Is this the housing Saint Pauli needs?*



“ACAB” is an acronym for “All Cops are Bastards” and is commonly found in graffiti and tattoos to protest police.



“Nous Sommes Tous Egaux” is French for “We are all equal”





2019



Source (all photos): Rose Carillo



## THE RUINS OF PROVIDENCE

Under Providence

by *Laura Kenney*

2019



Source: *Laura Kenney*





## THE RUINS OF PROVIDENCE

### Mall Rats

by *Laura Kenney*

2019

Plywood out, and china in. China hutch, crystal glassware, potted plants, in through the two-foot sliver in the facade-- and out the piles of zip ties, broken two-by-fours, refuse of the construction of the mammoth whose belly becomes a sleep space. Buckets of screws-- removed. And the cinder blocks, those which form the barrier between the world and here-- in. Four piece sectional couch. Table lamps. Cathode-ray tube television, and playstation, and photo albums, glossy slipcovers. Two days longer and the hardwood floors would have taken their place over the concrete. Four years of in, and out, and into the accidental home flowering in the space between the walls. Growth the consequence of crass demolition.

The fort sunk into rubble, picture it with plumes of powdered grout smoking up the air, chipped bricks and tattered screenprints, pulverized shit factory strewn with plastic cabinets busted mannequins plush creations, all struck to nothing. Absolute wasteland. All forgotten things. An artist haven leveled at the expense of urban development, all to make the parking lot for a future supermarket that wouldn't last a decade. Picture a bobcat trucking away paint cans, drum kit, a pair of fingerless gloves that once dangled from the ceiling, all rattling in its dirty claws. Leaving behind only remnants of the life-affirming death trap. Thunderclaps as it all came down.

So instead, a solution, a movement: a push-door, near identical to the model the mall installed themselves. Indistinguishable, a plain disguise beside the Macy's. A dance to avoid recognition; an inward slip at night, an emergence in the morning. A room windowless except for the thin pinhole casting the inverted city into the dark. A midnight camera obscura. And for the secret residents, the reckless, the empty mall at two in the morning becomes a playground, late-capitalist landscape of carpet, art-deco railings, stilled escalators. Inaudible trills of the playstation hidden behind it all, the sleeping bodies splayed across couches.

When the city brought down Fort Thunder, the mission became clear. Build a home out of that which displaced you. Build a home out of wasted space. Build a home with framed paintings, coffee table, throw pillows and blankets and lamps hooked up to extension cords feeding off of the building's internal power systems. Build what they attempted to tear down within you; the entropy, the garbage keeper, the creator. Steal the electricity; fuck shit up.

Name yourself trummerkind, *children of the ruins*.

**THE RUINS OF PROVIDENCE**  
**The Bells**  
*by Laura Kenney*



*Source: Laura Kenney*

The bells appear overnight, running up its oxidized spine. They, painted an industrial orange, hang at the junctions of its cross-supports and edges, spots of fluorescence against dead steel. When the wind works itself through the beams they chime with the clang of metal on metal, something musical, sometimes distant enough under the hum of traffic to be phantom sounds. Remnant echoes of the railroad crossings, warning chimes, the bridge rocking lower on its track, easing down into the gap. It's been waiting these forty-two years.

## WALKING On Walking by Anna Lenaker

2019

This paper is a product of my deeply-held conviction that the act of walking, of exploring the places within which one lives by foot, is absolutely essential. I will delineate what I take to be the potential social, political, existential, and environmental consequences of walking by appealing to thinkers across a number of disciplines, both inside and outside urban studies' orthodox canon. And it is through this exploration of the dimensions of walking that I will argue that wandering by foot, whether it be in dense urban centers, sprawling suburbia, or less populated regions, is important for individual and community well-being and, consequently, is an important area of study within the field of urban studies. The well-informed and engaged citizen, the environmentalist, the politician, and the city planner, to name just a few professions and/or positions I am particularly interested in focusing on, should all be avid walkers. While the boundaries between the categories of this investigation—social, political, existential, and environmental—are at all times porous and at times nonexistent, I will be subdividing the paper into them to allow for ease of discussion with the intention of complicating their relationship at the conclusion.

Walking as *political*. In her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs offers a critique of the orthodox urban planning policies of her day. Jacobs condemns the widespread impetus towards wholesale rebuilding and, instead, advocates for investing time and resources into revitalizing communities and city centers in ways that are attentive to their particularity and aesthetic character. Jacobs' project was politically radical at the time of its publication insofar as it offered a sharp rebuke of the urban renewal movement that culminated in the 1950s. Urban renewalists—an umbrella category comprised of those who had economic and political stakes in downtown city centers and wanted to redevelop large segments of such centers by removing buildings and communities whom they perceived as impediments to vitality—were condemned by Jacobs for their demonization of the diverse peoples and cultures that made downtown centers a vital and central place.

Jacobs believes that the best planning principles are not universal, but particular. Universal principles do not take into account the particularity of place nor the complexity of place and, because of this rigidity, they are inadequate. Jacobs' methodology, then, is to uncover by observation the behavioral patterns of cities. It is only by learning from real-life failures and successes of cities via intimate engagement—walking through and being embedded in a place with the intention of learning from it—that one can have an accurate understanding of how the city actually works. An understanding of how cities work in real life as opposed to the idealized conceptions embodied by orthodox city planning principles, according to Jacobs, is important because “it is the only way to learn what principles of planning and what practices in rebuilding can promote social and economic vitality in cities, and what practices and principles

will deaden these attributes.”

Walking, for Jacobs, is politically revolutionary. It is of the utmost importance that those who possess the power to enact changes within communities or communities’ built environments are intimately engaged with the communities and spaces within which they are decision-makers. Politicians and city planners being figures of primary interest here. It is essential that those who hold such forms of power are avid walkers. And, more broadly, it is important as well for citizens and/or members of a local community, however imagined and defined, to be avid walkers. Citizens and community members, too, are decision-makers whose choices impact the broader community and, consequently, it is important that all have some degree of familiarity with their local community and built environment. The ties between politics and walking within one’s local community, I hope, will become ever more clear in the next section as I turn to discuss the social dimension of walking.

Walking as *social*. Jacobs imagines the city as a complex organism, a place where heterogeneous peoples come together and provide varying services and functions in a complex weave of relationships. While one cannot fully capture the complexity of city life in any given medium, Jacobs does pinpoint places in her study where the elusive city organism manifests itself in part: the well-constructed city sidewalk being a prime example. Jacobs writes:

“A city sidewalk by itself is nothing. It is an abstraction. It means something only in conjunction with the buildings and other uses that border it, or border other sidewalks very near it...Streets and their sidewalks, the main public places of a city, are its most vital organs.”

This excerpt is part of a larger passage in which Jacob argues that sidewalks and streets are significant to the extent that they serve as places for people to encounter others, whether it be friends, acquaintances, or strangers. These day-to-day spontaneous or routine contacts over time builds what Jacobs refers to as the “trust of a city street.” Jacobs argues that sidewalks act as the sort of open and friendly public spaces that are integral for the cultivation of a local community built on mutual respect, trust, and civic engagement. The vitality of a city and its communities, then, largely depend on the life activities that take place in public spaces. If a city lacks sufficient public spaces for fostering neighborly relations, says Jacobs, the city and its people will suffer.

I’d like to briefly note some responses, both direct and indirect, to Jacobs’ claims by urban theorists for the purposes of highlighting what elements have survived unscathed to this day that I can apply to my thinking about the social dimension of walking. Jacobs’ philosophy fits within that of the later New Urbanist movement whose planning principles have as their key aim the enhancement of sense of community. Jacobs and New Urbanists both contend that “the way in which street patterns divide and connect a neighborhood influences people’s movement and interactions within that space.” This is not to say, however, says New Urbanist researcher Cliff Ellis, that

behavior is utterly determined by the arrangement of the built environment, but that the built environment is an important factor that must be considered. Thus, while studies conducted in the fields of urban studies and sociology differ in their findings on the ways and the extent to which different forms of walking (for recreation or for goal-oriented transport) and the built environment that one walks in impacts one's sense of community, there is a general consensus that walking does have some impact on building a sense of community.

While I cannot outline, then, the specific types of walking and places that are very conducive to building a sense of community, it is safe to say that walking is, in varying ways and extents, conducive to strengthening social bonds and one's sense of community. Walking is something that has social and, by extension, political consequences. The more connected a community is the greater their power. The more the individual is familiar with their local community and spatial environment, the more qualified they are to contest any proposed changes and/or to address any ills that they perceive. And these ills are the easiest to perceive when one spends time traversing their community by foot, talking to others, and observing the local happenings.

Walking as *existential*. When I say that walking is existential, I mean that walking has the power to reveal something significant about one's existence, about the state of mind that one is experiencing. I also include under this category the conviction arising from my own personal experience that walking can be an act of healing oneself. I take inspiration for this section, then, from my own experiences as well as the experiences of others recorded in their writings.

In *The Lonely City* Olivia Laing blends memoir and research in her exploration of her and other artists' experiences of loneliness in densely-populated New York City. A central theme of her book is walking, particularly, experiences of walking that are driven by loneliness and/or a restless desire to behold city life whether or not one is a full participant. In her book she writes that she enjoys "walking not as a means but as an end, an ideal occupation in and of itself." Here, Laing suggests what might be received as a revolutionary idea in this age dominated by goal-setting, achievement, and frantic rushing-about. Laing suggests that walking is an art unto itself, to be enjoyed for the sake of it and with no other goal in mind. To walk without a destination is to exist, I think, in a richly sacred manner akin, perhaps, to breathing.

Laing also writes of an experience of walking that is selfless or perhaps self-transcendent, saying:

"There are kinds of solitude that provide a respite from loneliness, a holiday if not a cure. Sometimes as I walked, roaming under the stanchions of the Williamsburg Bridge or following the East River all the way to the silvery hulk of the U.N., I could forget my sorry self, becoming instead as porous and borderless as the mist, pleasurablely adrift on the currents of the city. I didn't get this feeling when I was in my apartment; only when I was outside, either entirely alone or submerged in a crowd."

Laing characterizes walking outside, whether it be alone or in a crowd, as a form of solitude that provides a break from loneliness. Solitude can be understood in this context as a willful seclusion from others; a seclusion that can be spatial and/or mental. Loneliness, then, can be understood as solitude that is not desired and that is, in some way, imposed upon the individual experiencing it. It is interesting to me that Laing frames walking as a potential antidote to or, at least, a vacation from loneliness. While walking in this passage remains an individual act in its characterization as a kind of solitude, there is a sense that it is an act that subsumes the individual into the larger collective action of the city organism. Walking, then, can be understood as an antidote or reprieve from loneliness insofar as it enables in some cases the transcendence altogether of the lonely bounded individual by a more porous and/or borderless personal identification with the “currents of the city.” This is an altogether different type of sociability than the one discussed by Jacobs. But, I think it is an important one to consider insofar as it expresses a felt sense of community—albeit one whose existence arises not from standard social exchanges, but from a less tangible existential imagination of belonging.

In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* Annie Dillard intertwines rich detailed descriptions of the walks she takes around her home with philosophical ruminations on nature and life. Similar to Olivia Laing, she presents walking as a potentially life-affirming activity. Referencing her days spent stalking life around the creek, she writes, “I walk home exhilarated or becalmed, but always changed, alive.” For Dillard, great joy comes from observing the intricate complexity of the ecosystems surrounding her and of which she forms a part. And it is by foot that these ecosystems are best observed. Dillard’s writings exhibit the correlation between discovering the complexity of one’s surroundings and understanding oneself better. Walking, then, is life-affirming insofar as it is a vehicle for the life-affirming activity of attentively observing one’s surroundings and, consequently, one’s inner landscape. Although taking place in a sparsely-populated region, Dillard’s method of attentive walking and observation can readily be applied to one’s exploration of the biological and social ecosystems of densely-populated regions. As one comes to know their human and non-human living communities better, one comes to know themselves better.

Walking as *environmental*. I am not using environmental here to refer to the literal property of walking as an environmentally-friendly form of transportation, but, rather, to the ways in which walking is conducive to environmental thought and awareness. And this environmental awareness, as I will discuss, is necessarily existential and political.

In “Errant paths: the poetics and politics of walking” David Pinder surveys ways in which walking has received increased attention within the fields of art, social and cultural studies, and geography. “Walking practices,” he says, “are often mobilised as a means for sensing and learning about spaces...and for finding meaning within and potentially re-enchanting environments.” Pinder, here, succinctly points to some key

utilities of walking. Like Dillard, he recognizes the confluence of walking and attentive observation that is conducive to gathering knowledge of one's environment. Walking is a good means for "sensing and learning about spaces." Additionally, walking is a pursuit of meaning. Pinder suggests that walking has the potential to generate some form of greater intimacy with, closeness to, and/or wonder at one's environment. Walking has the potential to find meaning and re-enchant one's environment.

Given these potential uses and outcomes of walking, it is easy to see how walking can go hand-in-hand with greater environmental concern and awareness. When one walks, one becomes more aware of the details and rhythms of the environment through which one traverses. When walking, one notices the trash, as well as the non-human animals that are fellow inhabitants of the places we demarcate as our "community" or "home" or "city." Feelings of greater intimacy with, closeness to, or wonderment at one's environment, translates to one feeling that there is much more at stake when the well-being of some aspect of the environment is threatened.

The greatest dangers to the environment's wellbeing are human beings' actions and, by extension, human beings' proclivities to indifference, denial, and/or a general refusal to take steps to mitigate individual and collective environmental impacts. Such actions and proclivities, whether motivated by fear, laziness, or political and economic incentives, are always dangerous. It is necessary for individuals to internalize what is at stake should we continue harmful environmental practices. This internalization, I think, can be understood as a recognition of the shared, hastened existential vulnerability of living beings should species extinction and the impacts of global warming continue to accelerate. Widespread shift in human action requires a widespread shift in individuals' self-understanding. Individuals must take a candid stock of their existence, that is, of the intrinsic vulnerability of mortality and the fact of human limitation. Only when one admits that there is something significant at stake, can one conscientiously take action. The political and the existential cannot be separated from the environmental. And I suggest that the practice of walking and being attentive to one's surroundings is a step towards cultivating greater existential and political awareness of environmental degradation. The environmentalist must assuredly be an avid walker.

Walking as *all of the above*. The purpose of this paper has been to complicate the act of walking in order to render it serviceable as a method of inquiry within the field of urban studies, as well as more broadly. Walking, I argue, is a useful and necessary tool for the politician, the citizen, the community-member, the city planner, the environmentalist, and all impactful decision-makers. And, more personally, walking is important for the individual in search of community, solitude, and self-discovery. To conclude, I'd like to end with an excerpt from a book by landscape designer John Brinckerhoff Jackson titled *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*. Jackson writes on odology, the study of roads and paths, arguing that roads and paths are so much more than mere methods to reach a final destination:



“But odologists seem to forget -- and we ourselves sometimes forget -- that the road serves other needs. For untold thousands of years we traveled on foot over rough paths and dangerously unpredictable roads, not simply as peddlers or commuters or tourists, but as men and women for whom the path and road stood for some intense experience: freedom, new human relationships, a new awareness of the landscape. The road offered a journey into the unknown that could end up allowing us to discover who we were and where we belonged.”

Jackson, like Olivia Laing, makes a valuable point: walking is more than a utilitarian means to reach a particular destination. Walking is an experience: sometimes social, sometimes revelatory, and, given its mechanics, always more attentive to the particularity of one’s surroundings than other modes of transportation. Roads and paths are places of self-discovery and community-building. For Jackson, roads and paths are much like Annie Dillard’s existential explorations of Tinker Creek and Jane Jacobs’ bustling sidewalks.

This paper dreams of the potential uses of walking within a world in which individuals are not limited by factors of race, gender, age, physical ability, and socio-economic status, among other things. To say that someone should be an avid walker is to assume a whole slough of privileges that allow them to walk without consequence, without fear, and without pain. I recognize that this is not the case. I will only argue this: if you have the privileges and capabilities that allow you to walk, you should be an avid walker. This particularly holds if you are in a position of power where knowledge of a particular community and/or environment could potentially impact your decision-making.

## WALKING

### On the California Camp Fire

by Anna Lenaker

2019

I am a lover of walks. I moved to the town of Magalia, California, with my brother and sister-in-law when I was a sophomore in high school. Though it took me just under two hours to get to school each morning with the commute—a combination of walking and riding the regional bus line as I passed through the town of Paradise and then into Chico—I loved living amidst the trees. I loved the way they smelled after a heavy rain, and the snow they carried in the winter. I spent many of my days walking amongst them, sometimes alone and sometimes with friends who were kind enough to make the commute to visit me. I was drawn to the different sorts of moss that grew on the trees' bark, the mushrooms that grew on the carcasses of older felled trees, the crunch of pine needles and crispy leaves underfoot. I was interested in the miscellaneous discarded objects I came across on my hikes: the deflated basketballs, old Big Gulp cups from the 7-11 one town over, broken beer bottles, discarded assorted footwear, and empty candy wrappers. Sometimes I'd meet fellow neighbors on my walks who were either in search of an adventure like me or walking their dogs. I'd often talk with them awhile, hear their stories of why they had moved up into the mountains, how some things have changed and how others have not at all. Over the years, I grew familiar with the rhythms of these tree-canopied woods. Each season had its own sounds, its own music, that sounded when I traversed the landscape. In the dead of winter the creek would be frozen and sometimes I'd dare to step on it. And, in the summer, the creek cooled me down as I walked through it, eyes fixed to the creek bed looking for polished rocks to bring home and place on my family's patio. These memories of walks I cherish. The polished rocks witness to me from my family's porch reminding me of all that I've learned in the woods.

The woods are different now. The Camp Fire burned through these woods along with the towns of Magalia, Paradise, and Pulga, from the 8th of November to the 25th of November. I have not yet been back to see them as many of the burned areas are still under evacuation at the time of my writing. But I've seen the pictures and videos where they appear disfigured and aflame, so alien from the trees and the landscapes of my memories. I am in deep mourning. In my processing of this loss, I have been thinking a lot about several seemingly unconnected but, to me, inseparably intertwined concepts: walking, climate change, community, Freudian slips, and the relationship between time and memory.

Before I draw out the relationship between these concepts, however, I'd like to speak a bit more philosophically about walking. Walking, like breathing, is no simple act. Walking, I believe, has the potential for beneficial social, political, existential, and environmental consequences. Wandering by foot, whether it be in dense urban centers, sprawling suburbia, or the less-populated regions of my forest community, is important for individual, community, and environmental well-being. My conviction



that walking is of the utmost importance arises from my experiences of walking and what I've learned from my journeys. I hope to illustrate what the discipline of walking has to offer to the field of urban studies. Of course, I think that such reflections extend well outside of the field of urban studies to include everyone who has the privileges and the capabilities to walk attentively and observe.

My heart aches for each acre that was burnt in the fire. I read that when the fire burnt through the town of Paradise it moved at a pace of a football field per second, or 44 acres each minute. Since I've never owned a car, my default measurement of distance is how long it'll take me to walk somewhere. I imagine it would take me quite a while to walk from one end of the burn area to the other. I can't shake the feeling that in order to process this loss, I have to walk through it. I am waiting for the evacuation order to be lifted and then I'll begin walking.

Walking, for me, is intimate. I feel a closeness to the environment around me while walking that I do not experience when traveling via other mediums. I can try to imagine the loss of life—human and non-human—from the fire. But it is an entirely different thing to experience the loss by walking the landscapes that were once filled with the bustling of community members, the darting of deer, and the chattering of birds.

The outpouring of love and support for those impacted by the fire has been astounding. The communities that have been displaced have been met by the support of other communities, near and far.

Trump visited Paradise on the 17th of November 2018. Standing against a backdrop of homes leveled by the fire, he mistakenly referred to the town as “Pleasure” in what I found to be the most absurd and hilarious Freudian slip, not altogether unexpected given the character of the orator. Trump blamed the intensity of the fire on anything but climate change, stating, instead, that it was a product of poor upkeep and not enough raking. Laughter can be a nice break in dark times, so I assuredly have that to thank him for. Laughter, like walking for the able-bodied individual, is a vital action for the socially and politically engaged. Laughter is an act of survival.

Landscapes are storehouses of memories. The cumulative loss both material and mental from the Camp Fire is collectively immeasurable. It is an existential tragedy. But despite this loss, I hope to build new memories in the charred places. I will walk and I will help clean up. I will support my community in the ways that I am able. And I eagerly anticipate the day when the first person begins to rebuild their home. The Camp Fire is an environmental tragedy. It is one of many unprecedented wildfires that are a result of anthropogenic climate change. The Camp Fire is also a political event. It has prompted the opinions of climate change deniers and pro-rakers such as Trump. Yet, it has also spurred collective actions that are remarkable testaments to the power of community and the power of the people in the face of disaster.

In my years of walking the shaded paths of these small forest communities, I've fall-

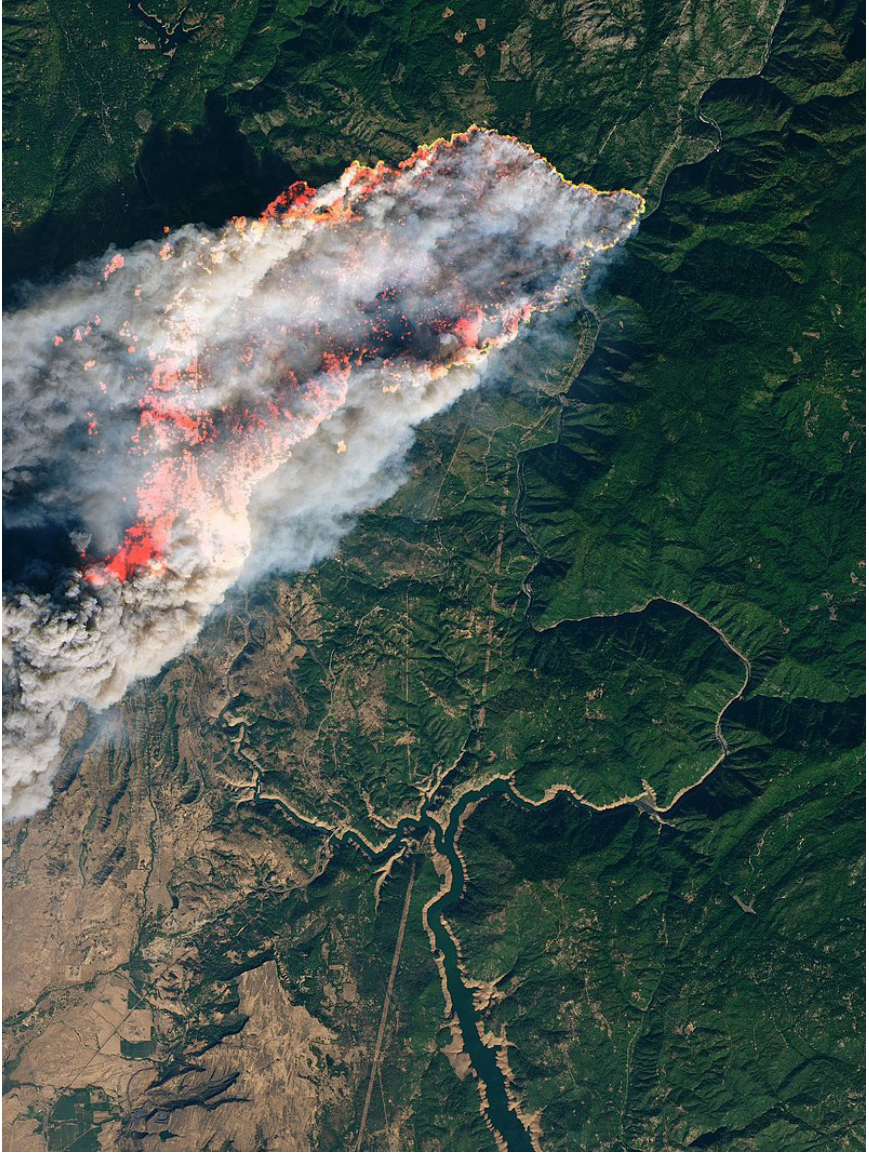
en in love with these now altered places. In my walks I've learned about the different sorts of trees and the birds that inhabit them, I've observed the changing of the flowing streams, I've met my neighbors and their dogs, I've seen the main highways littered with trash and the community members who walk alongside the highway collecting it, I've gone away for college and yearned to return, and I've daydreamed of my future while my feet cut swiftly through the fallen leaves. Through my walks, I got to know the places that I'm from, the community that surrounds me, and myself just a bit more.



Source (all photos): Anna Lenaker



Source: Wikimedia Commons



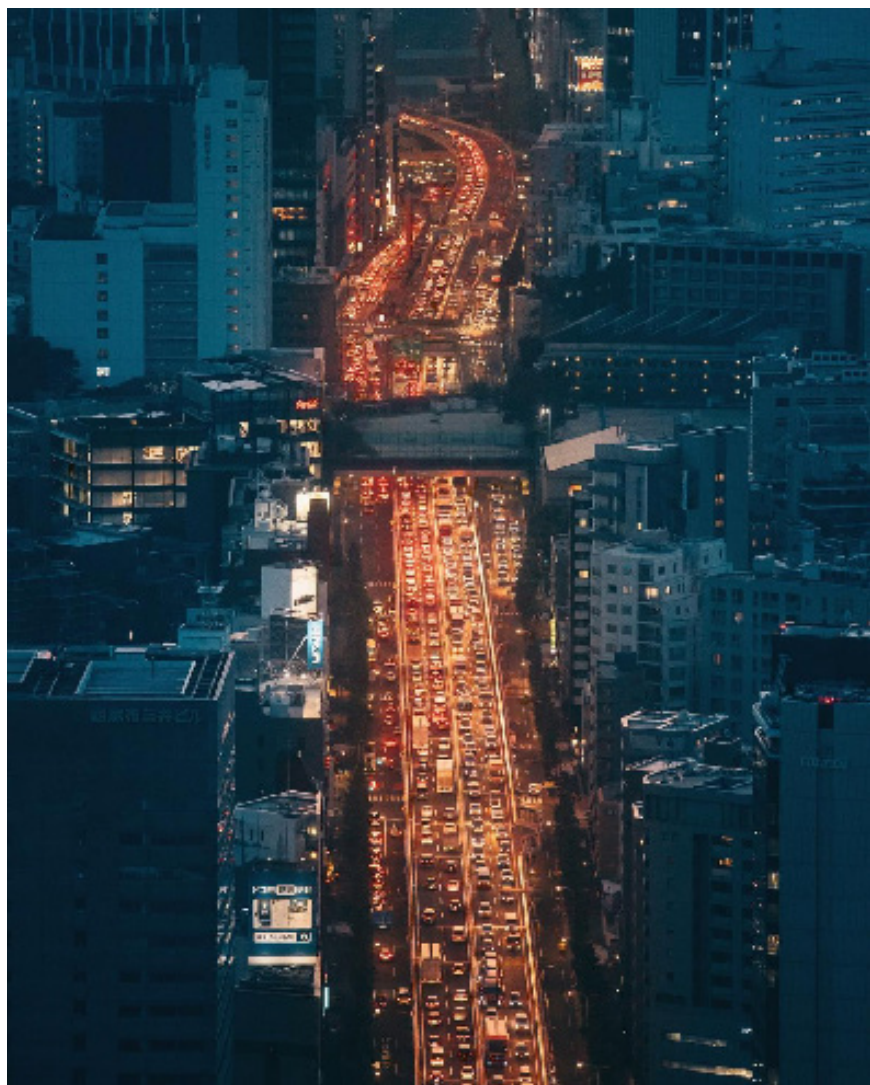
**SELECTED WORKS**  
**Scenes from Cities**  
*by Keiichiro Kinoshita*

2019



*Way Back Home*





*Rush Hour in Tokyo*



*Random Access Memories*



*Lost in Time*

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