



The Urban Studies Newsletter

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Edited by Lance Gloss



Photo: Ruth Bamuwanye, Cape Town - Article p. 08

The Rent Question:

Alum Philip Crean '15.5 on Housing

Why is housing so expensive? Students ask this all the time. Rents rise relentlessly—especially in the cities where new graduates eye opportunities. Boston, New York, San Francisco have grown synonymous with costly housing. On Nov 6th, a loose coalition of Boston groups with a hand in the city's housing policy—Mass Housing Partnership (MHP), Citizens Housing and Planning Institute, Urban Land Institute (ULI), City Awake, and Alliance for Business Leadership—hosted a discussion on this very question: "Why is Housing so Expensive?!"

Geared toward non-housing professionals, the event focused on a "basic knowledge of the systems and processes in place, which determine the prices of rent and the barriers to homeownership." These are the words of Philip Crean of MHP. Massachusetts-born, and having served for three years with the US Marine Corps, Crean graduated from Urban Studies at Brown in the Class of 2015.5.

Phil found his passion for community development, switched out of the Economics Department, and took up a research internship with Housing Works

RI. Working for MHP has meant partnering with communities throughout the state. Crean explains that factors dictating the cost of housing vary from place to place. Many towns and suburbs, says Crean, "have very restrictive land-use and zoning regulations that are geared to single-family, one-story homes rather than higher density." This means fewer beds per square mile, and higher housing costs.

In many urban areas, disinvestment in past decades has given way to new development and an influx of young professionals. If new housing isn't built, or it isn't affordable, long-time residents can be priced out. "Then there's a real fear of dispossession," says Crean, "and people articulate that in many ways." One way is non-participation. Groups like MHP want people to participate across the spatial spectrum.

By sharing information, the minds behind "Why is Housing so Expensive?!" aim to get people reconsidering their assumptions about housing. "It should spark a conversation," said Crean with fervor. "From 'why' follows, 'what's to do about it?'"

Brown Students in Real Estate host Brad Case

Brown Students in Real Estate (BSRE) hit the ground running when they launched last year. Under the leadership of founder Mika Gross, who graduated last year, and 2017-2018 BSRE President Philip Demeulenaere, the group fills a heretofore-empty niche in the Brown Community. BSRE aims to provide mentorship and learning opportunities for all students interested in real estate, while members continue to learn and think critically about the sector.

As Gross affirmed last year, the club creates "outlets for other applications in real estate (such as architecture, environmental design, and others) to help the general body grow and discover." BSRE prioritizes connections and experiences that lead to career opportunities in real estate. One can visit their website to find a host of career-search resources, join BSRE field trips to New York and Boston, and apply to join BSRE's team at the reputed Cornell Case Competition. For the more casually-interested, BSRE hosts events throughout the year.

On October 24, BSRE invited Brad Case, an economist and Senior Vice President at the National Association of Real Estate Investment Trusts (NAREIT), to give a presentation and Q&A for Brown

students. About 25 students, many of them BSRE members, came to see Case's rousing presentation on public and private real estate markets. "I'm saying things that you aren't going to read in a textbook," he said as he introduced a slide showing metrics of the hotel market after 9/11, and real estate investments made just prior to the 2007 financial crash.

Discussion was advanced, but offered something to all in attendance. Case specializes in REITs—Real Estate Investment Trusts—and he spent a good deal of time explaining how these work. But he also talked about his experience growing up amid development in Honolulu during the Japanese economic boom of the 1980's, which "turned into a lifelong interest in real estate," and filled out the presentation with shrewd advice to students. "If

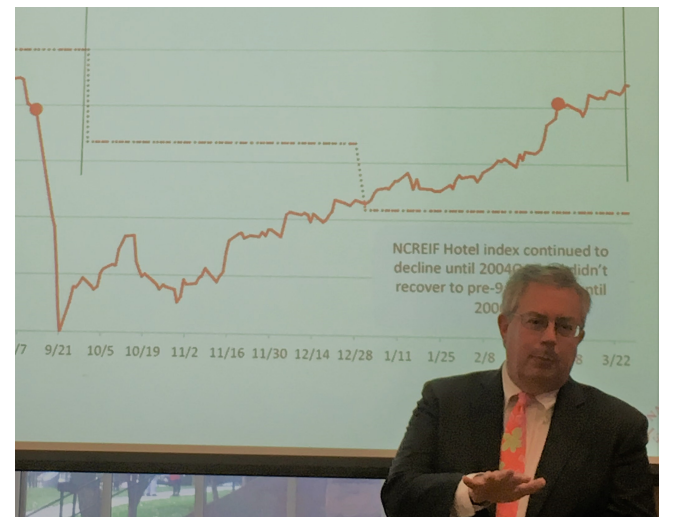


Photo: Urban Studies Newsletter

you're going to make money in real estate," he said of REITs, "this is how you do it." Case pushed students not to grow brash with success. "Educated people suffer from overconfidence," he warned, "you want to keep yourself honest."

**I wish the rent
Was heaven sent**

- Langston Hughes

Letter from the DUG

Lydia Elias B'19 and John Beck B'18

Greetings from the Urban Studies DUG! As your DUG leaders this year, we are super excited to see you all around campus and at the events we have planned for all of you.

The fall 2017 semester had a great start with the Welcome Back event that housed fellow concentrators, prospective concentrators and faculty over apple-cider doughnuts and coffee. We had great conversations about all the varied interests our concentrators have; from urban design, to transportation planning, to public policy, among many other subjects. We hope to have more great discussions and learn more about our fellow concentrators at future events. A few professors also spoke about their research and future courses that will be offered in the spring.

Just a few weeks ago, the first bus tour of the 2017-2018 academic year, sponsored by the Urban Studies Program, was led by Professor Robert Azar, Deputy Director of Providence's Department of Planning and Development. Attendees had a

chance to learn about new developments in the city directly from someone intimately involved in many of the projects.

Overall, tour-goers reported that Professor Azar provided a unique and thorough source of development insight. Professor Azar effectively captured the audience with his captivating knowledge and informative answers.

Upcoming events for the spring include the annual Brown Degree Days where we will bring in Urban Studies alumni to discuss life after Brown; an open house to assist sophomores in their declaration process; and finally an end-of-year event to hear seniors' theses and capstone presentations and celebrate the amazing work that they have completed.

We hope to foster a strong Urban Studies community for concentrators and faculty. Thank you for supporting the DUG and we hope to see you at future events!

Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.

- Italo Calvino

Letter from the Editor

Lance Gloss B'18

Ten years ago, a UN report proclaimed that half of the world's people lived in cities. It's safe to say we've exceeded that by now. As I see it, the three-plus billion people still living outside cities still have to live in a cities' world. Few spaces are untouched by the metropolis—its politics, its media, its demands. Every sector and every discipline have had a hand in shaping our cities, and cities shape outcomes for each of these. We will all be working together to shape the urban future, whether we do so consciously or not.

Fortunately, Brown University has made excellent headway toward this ideal of collaboration. The administrators and

faculty of the Urban Studies Program, its concentrators and alumni, and the guests who come to take part in Brown's lively academic culture all contribute to the fast-paced discussion on cities here on campus. All the better, given the fast pace of urbanization.

On the following pages, read up on the challenges we face in this world of cities, and the solutions being generated at Brown.

Letter from the Director

Professor Dietrich Neumann

There is currently more building activity in Providence than at any time since the great Depression!! We learned this remarkable fact on a recent Urban Studies Bus tour from Bob Azar, the city's Deputy Director of Planning, and Professor of the Practice with us. It was the 19th tour in our 4th year - fully booked as always by a lively mix of students, staff, faculty and residents. Upcoming tours will take us to locations of the Crimtown podcast, murals in the city and to an exhibition opening at City Arts with works by local youth and students in Rebecca Carter's class.

Providence is small enough to serve as a perfect case study for urban experiences, planning complexities and a city's aspirations (will Amazon move here??). Many of our 59 concentrators take Prof. Pacewicz's field work class or sign up as 'engaged scholars,' to be placed with local organizations. Any building activity is closely watched, every restaurant

opening much talked about. But still, the city is large enough to harbor an endless supply of potential discoveries and surprises, and our students usually fall in love with Providence - and find it hard to leave.

At the same time, students and faculty regularly engage in global issues. Prof. Kamara will teach another urban design studio with a project in Niger next semester, Prof. Ascher will address questions of real estate in New York City, honors students have research projects in cities around the world and across the US. This newsletter, beautifully assembled by Lance Gloss, perfectly matches the interdisciplinary mix of global and local that defines Urban Studies at Brown.

Bus Tour Schedule

Tour #3 - D. Neumann

Fri, Dec. 8, 2017 3:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Tour #4 - TBD

Fri, March 9, 2018 3:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Tour #5 - Samuel Zipp

Fri, April 6, 2018 3:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Tour #6 - Rebecca Carter

Fri, May 4, 2018 5:00 PM - 6:30 P

A hallowed tradition in the Urban Studies Program, bus tours offer a chance to hear from faculty and guests about goings-on in Providence. Each tour takes a different angle and a different route. Be sure to register on the Program website—tours fill up quickly!

Contents

Cover

The Rent Question: Alum Philip Crean on Housing Brown Students in Real Estate Host Brad Case

2

Letters from the DUG, Director, and Editor

3

New Engaged Scholars Course with Professor Rebecca Carter In Conversation with Visitng Professor Kate Ashcher

4

In Conversation with Professor Mariam Kamara

5

In Conversation with Swati and Ramesh Ramanathan

6

Summer Internship in the Swamp by Rachel Rood-Ojalvo Visit to a Nuclear Power Plant by John Beck

7

Career Launch: A Letter by Ben Berke

8

Blogging the Benefit Street Arsenal by Francesca Gallo Eyes Adjusting to Dystopia by Ruth Bamuwamye Studies Bus Tour Schedule

New Engaged Scholars Course by Professor Rebecca Carter

Professor Rebecca Carter is back with a bang to Brown University, after a much-appreciated sabbatical. With one foot in Urban Studies and the other in the Department of Anthropology, Carter's research has taken her throughout Francophone Atlantic, from New Orleans to Dakar. Of the three courses she conducts this year, Carter most anticipates the launch of a new offering in the Engaged Scholars Program.

Carter has long had a hand in the Engaged Scholars Program at Brown. In designated courses, students work with the Swearer Center at Brown and local organizations. In "Youth, Art, and the Promised City: Recreating The Green Book,"

undergraduates will partner with CityArts for Youth, a non-profit in Providence that provides free after-school arts education programs to kids aged 8-14.

The Green Book is The Negro Motorists Green Book, a travel guide listing hospitable motels, diners, and gas stations for African Americans traveling by car in the Jim Crow era. For thirty years, this book made all the difference. Students in Professor Carter's class will use the travel guide as a launching point to explore movement in city space using historiography, design, and creative social inquiry. Working with the students at CityArts, undergraduates will then develop a new guide focused on the

neighborhood of the arts program, to reflect the youths' knowledge and a collective vision for sustainable, equitable urban movement. To see what the collaboration yields, join Professor Carter on the final Urban Studies Bus Tour of the year as she guides us to Providence CityArts for Youth, exploring art and mobility along the way.

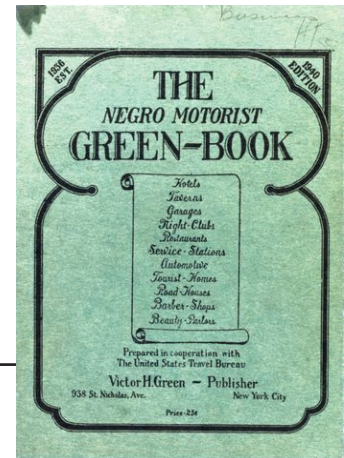


Photo: Wikimedia Commons

In Conversation // Kate Ascher

Visiting Professor of Urban Studies in Spring 2018

Kate Ascher is Professor at the Columbia Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation in NYC and the leader of the cities group at BuroHappold Engineering. She graduated with a B.S. Political Science from Brown, took her MSc and PhD at the London School of Economics and went on to become assistant director of the Port Authority of NY & NJ and Executive VP at the NYC Economic Development Corporation. Ascher coordinated many public-private partnerships on infrastructure and development that are defining that city into the future. In her books The Works: Anatomy of a City and The Heights: Anatomy of a Skyscraper, Ascher explores overlooked infrastructures and the towering structures found in urban centers worldwide.

Professor Ascher will teach her first course with Urban Studies at Brown in the Spring of 2018: How to Shape a City: An Introduction to Urban Development. Ascher delivered a sneak preview of the upcoming course to students in the urban studies introductory course, The City, in early November. The Newsletter caught up with Kate after her presentation, to bring you a closer look at Ascher's work and ideas:

What does it mean to you, coming from your industrious career and from Columbia, to come back to teach at your undergraduate institution?

It feels very strange. I'm looking forward to it—that's why I reached out to Professor Neumann initially—but it feels very different to come back in this capacity. I'm used to being a student, coming back for reunions, and also as a parent. And now there's this whole new perspective, and now I'll be a professor.

You work a lot on the interface between city and water, from the NYC waterfront to the Mississippi Delta. Let's talk about the water front. What has the waterfront interface meant for cities over the last century?

For the most part, the river and the sea offered a huge opportunity, because the working waterfront had pretty much disappeared. Every city that had depended on the waterfront for its livelihood—and most did, that's why they were formed where they were—saw a lot of that industry disappear with containerization, because you weren't schlupping stuff back and forth along the docks. The longshoremen disappeared, container ports came in. A lot of this land

with access to the waterfront, which was beautiful, became open for something other than industry. Instead of markets and freight deliveries and chaos, you could have access to the water.

It's taken a long time for cities to put that in motion. New York City did it's west side, now it's the east side, Brooklyn, Queens. Providence is figuring its way, and recovered its rivers. Every city has done this. It may not be good that the working class jobs were lost to automation, but we can recover that access.

And is the call for climate resilience along the coasts influencing how that takes shape?

It is and it isn't. There are new requirements, new ways of thinking, and lots of discussion about barriers to build in the harbor. There are places where the City has had to relocate communities or let land be reclaimed by the water. In those areas hit by sea level rise, we see new regulations and approaches to building that don't always make sense. Someone will spend \$600,000 to lift a \$300,000 house higher off the ground. But people feel that the government should pay to help them live there.

A contentious issue! For another: the course description for "How to Shape a City" asks how "run-down parts of an older city evolve overnight into "hot," happening places?" This sounds like a question about gentrification. Many Brown students have been to Crown Heights, to the Mission District. What is gentrification? Is it a fearsome thing?

Gentrification isn't a good or bad thing. It's a thing to think about. It does mean that there will be displacement. It also means that the city continues to be vibrant, that new neighborhoods arise, new small businesses, and generating more tax revenue. So neither good nor bad, gentrification needs to be managed. Make sure that some housing remains affordable, so no one has to relocate. Make sure that someone is breathing new life into neighborhoods, doing business, creating jobs for the whole community.

What can students get out of your upcoming course that they can't get anywhere else?

That's hard, you know, because I don't know everything that's on offer. I don't know, is the answer. The course is a high-level canter through the issues I talked about today: historic preservation, density, transit-oriented development, communities. We go deeper on these, but it remains a multi-faceted look at the creation of the built environment. Real estate is a creative act. I want to make sure people understand that it's not all about money, it's about creating place. If folks are interested in the built environment—they want to be architects, developers, contractors what have you—then this is the course to add depth to your foundation.

In Conversation // Mariam Kamara

Adjunct Associate Professor of Urban Studies, Brown University



Photo: atelier masōmī

*Professor Mariam Kamara is the newest Adjunct Associate Professor of Urban Studies at Brown, having given her first course in Spring of 2017. She brings a practitioner's perspective to the program, as Principal of architecture firm atelier masōmī, and as co-founder of architectural collective united4design. Much of her work is based in Niamey, Niger, where she grew up and frequents throughout the year. In *Designing, Planning, and Building in West Africa* last Fall, Kamara introduced students to informality in urban systems. In Niamey, some 70% of exchange takes place outside of the regulated (or 'formal') economy. The Professor combines novel approaches to informality with a rigorous balance of design and theory. The Urban Journal sat down with Professor Kamara in Providence this Fall to discuss life paths, software coding, and de-colonizing design.*

You weren't in architecture for the first half of your career. What were you up to?

More than the first half of my career. I was a software developer for 6 or 7 years, and that's after going to undergraduate and grad school.... But I didn't enjoy it, I did it because it's one of those common sense things to do... it's a solid career, but I always wanted to be an architect.

I was fourteen when I decided I wanted to be an architect, but coming from where I come from, my family was like uh... here's your choice: engineer, doctor. When you're lucky enough to get sent thousands of miles away to the US to get an education, I was 18, I thought, you have to be smart about it. So I thought engineering. Computers seemed interesting. Coding, you get to be a bit creative, you are making something out of nothing. It's kind of like architecture.

So they're similar processes, architecture and coding?

Yes! You sit there, you have an idea, and you make it a reality. That's why there's such a thing as software architecture. That's what you do, you build this program, and it's supposed to behave a certain way.

So it's kind of similar, or so I told myself, but after a while I could not imagine doing it anymore... the corporate thing, moving up the ladder, managing. I was just done. So, quite spectacularly, I quit my job. I had a baby, and I went to school. An accelerated master's program where you combine everything from undergrad and a masters. I went back to school, 4 years, and was reborn.

Did your talent with computers translate to architecture when you went to U. of Washington for your Masters?

When I started going to school and everyone was fascinated by computers and what they could do for architecture. Since I wasn't impressed by the technology, I

wasn't intimidated. People were impressed by these gadgets. I think that's why I'm all about sketching everything. I realized quickly that technology can become a barrier. I need a process, to think and to draw. And then you can go to the computer, and that's easy enough.

*Your design-focus came through in your course last semester. I see you've changed the name for the Spring: *Designing the 21st Century City in West Africa: Informality and New Urban Planning Languages*. What is informality, for readers, and why do you teach about it?*

For me, it just was. I didn't really have to think about it deeply. That's just the environment I grew up in. It was just this thing that kind of grafted itself around the city I lived in. And then I started studying architecture and found, oh, they call this informality. The meaning being, there's an idea that there's this formal way of doing things—a city should look a certain way—and anything that doesn't fall into those criteria is informal. And when I first heard that, I found it incredibly insulting. All of a sudden, I'm thinking, who gets to decide? Everything I saw around me was informal. I was being told that, me, everyone I knew, what we were doing was wrong. Illegitimate. And I refused to believe this. Sure, what happens is not the same. But by calling it informal, we automatically degrade it. No.

If the gold standard is a Western standard, are Western cities It's odd. It's not that all western cities are the same, with the same standards. It's that, whenever a city is western, what happens there is formal. That's what makes it formal. You see that space over there? That parklet? If this popped up in Africa, it would be informal. But we don't see it as informal here, people just think, "oh my god here's the cool space," and they think, it's here, so it's formal. Even though this is new, and it's just grafted onto the street. We do the same thing, it's informal.

So now, these parklets and public spaces come around and are successful, and they are applauded here. You've integrated something into the street. And it's complicated. This place is there because it's approved, so you can say it's the aspect of legality that matters. But why is it illegal in my country? Because of the mentality, which they have when they write the rules.

So how can informality be expressed, if we frame it positively and try to design for it?

Perhaps, the 21st century will be about this. These looser, informal ways of thinking about urbanization. The demographic explosion of cities means that things will have to be more nimble, anyway. Many places in the so-called developing world have put themselves in this bind, thinking, this is how it has to be done. And this all from the 19th century. Its recent—deciding what is a storefront, and how this and that will look. But in a place, people have all of these activities that aren't reflected in the design. When these activities are built in, then you start to have character.

I am anxious, seeing cities in Africa growing economically, but where the concern is only to modernize themselves—meaning look as much like the western city as they can. But the western city made tons of mistakes! Cars are a big culprit. They built highways, and now in Boston, they are taking down the highways, putting in walking streets. Back there, people need to realize that things here are being undone. The change that's happening here should be happening there, and the informal is already happening there. This type of thinking should be everywhere. It's not about how educated or wealthy you are, it's a matter of what we take for granted.

So, 30 years from now, maybe you're looking back and can say, yeah, that was the shift.

It has to be. We don't have a choice. It's happening on its own, you can't stop it, so you might as well get ahead of it.

In Conversation // Swati and Ramesh Ramanathan Founders, Janaagraha Centre For Citizenship and Democracy

Bangalore-based urbanists Swati and Ramesh Ramanathan returned to Brown this Fall as part of an ongoing relationship with the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown. From their base in Bangalore, the dynamic couple has helped to write the book on 21st century urbanism. Ramesh is a self-described banker, and the founder and chair of Janalakshmi Financial Services, soon to be the Jana Small Finance Bank, a national leader in urban microfinance. Swati, who took her M.S. in design from Pratt Institute, is an author on the Jaipur 2025 Master Plan and the lead author of the National Urban Spatial Planning and Development 2013 Guidelines. The two founded Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy in 2001, and through it have propagated new methods for participatory governance in India's rapidly-growing cities. The list goes on... For a glimpse into their work, the Newsletter caught up with the Ramanathans as they closed up shop at the Center for Contemporary South Asia at Watson.

So, the two of you had a bit of a career shift about 20 years ago. What happened?

Swati: Well, we decided to move back home. We had come to the United States to get an education, and then we stayed here to build careers, and then we decided that after about a decade of living here in the West—we moved to London for a little under two years—we decided our hearts lay in giving back. So though we came to the US, like every other middle class youth of our times, seeking a better life for ourselves and greater experiences, I think the draw to go back home was motivated by the sense that we want to contribute to the issues and challenges, specifically of our cities back home. That's why we picked up careers one day and moved.

Ramesh: Like most things in life, I think it happened through a set of specific experiences. Living in the Northeast gave us, accidentally, some of those experiences. I think the Northeast... does have a very participatory process of governance, certainly in the towns that we lived in. Whenever we moved, we got our mail boxes stuffed. Volunteer in soup kitchens, stuff like that. We never did that all the years that we lived in the US.

But we had moved into a new town, and there was an invitation to clean up the local park that Sunday, and we said it's a great way to know the neighbors—selfish reasoning—so we decided to turn up. It wasn't anything great, they gave out a pitchfork and some sacks, and we did that for a few hours, had a beer after that, met people.

Monday morning, I was taking the train into Manhattan—I used to work in the city—and the guy who was heading up the park clean up was standing 20 feet away from me, dressed like me, a banker, and I walked up to him and said “aren't you the guy who was organizing the park clean up?” and he said yes, and I said “I thought you were some kind of a tree-hugging environmentalist, whose life was built around this.” But obviously that wasn't the case. He cared a lot, and he did that as part of his life.

That was an experience that opened us up to a range of other things that average Americans had integrated into their lives: joining school boards, participating in municipal budgets. And this was very different than our experience back in India. We were carrying around these cardboard caricatures of democracy. What we saw here was much more vibrant and engaged. So we thought, we could go and make something happen like this in India. As Swati said, we were young enough, we were born in cities and had worked in great cities around the world. We wanted to go back and work on cities.

To what extent are you transplanting practices and tools that you've accrued here in the West, and to what extent do those have to be renegotiated in the context of India's cities?

Swati: It depends on what we were looking at. Many of the ideas—for example, participatory budgeting, workshops, having the tools for that—those were things we took as concepts. We weren't looking

to reinvent the wheel, but we did need to adapt what we took to the specific context of our country, our specific cities, our cultural and political environment, our governance structures. A lot of adapting. But certainly we were informed not just by the United States, but as we grew and continued our work, by different parts of the world.

I think that the key in what Ramesh is saying is the idea of participation: the role of the citizen, beyond a ballot-box exercise, but as something with a deeper meaning. For example, here, the youth volunteer during primaries—that's not something that happens in India, though it's starting. Between elections, citizens ensure that governments are accountable. These concepts were eye-openers for us...

It's not enough for each of us to say, I have to do right, study hard, get a good job, build a career, provide for my family. There is an underlying social fabric and social capital to which we all have to continuously contribute. In urban India especially, that was being lost. In the village scenario, we did have it—communities looking after the well and public assets and all that—but I think post-independence, especially with urbanization, that sense of continuing agency was lost... That was the 'a-hah' moment for us.

Ramesh: In terms of adaptation... I think the big difference is that the systems of government—at the city level, state level, or federal—have very little capacity.

They're not as organized or as efficient or as capable to deliver. If I may take an example from [downtown Providence], there are many examples that reflect a sophisticated capability on the part of city government, the planning department, the different stakeholders of the city—real estate developers, the restricting of I-195, the distribution of the land, the processes by which that land is now being used—all of that is usually missing in India.

If we are going to solve the problem of urbanization, which is happening at the speed of globalization—not like in American cities during the industrial age; much faster, with more people—we're confronted



Photo: Jana Urban Space Foundation

by a larger problem moving at a faster pace. To compound it, you have a state machinery that doesn't have the capability to deal with it. Even picking up the garbage...to sewer systems to transport... and more sophisticated tools like distribution of land and engagement with market forces... all of that is not there, and the rules of the game are not in place. So the gaps have to be filled by concerned stakeholders, starting outside government. That's the role that we play. We help identify these possibilities, and work closely with government and citizens to bridge these, and show what is actually doable.

What kind of problem solving would you like to see in urban studies department like ours?

Ramesh: I think, if you use the term urban studies, you have to recognize that it's inherently interdisciplinary. Cities are so complex that the best you can ask for from the university is to get us every department. Let econ enter, let technology come in.

Swati: And the spatial analytics, because we have to be situated.

Ramesh: Right, and of course we want the social sciences, the anthropologists, but that's not enough. Bring them together. If you take a singular view of cities—Asian cities, US cities—you won't see the full picture. You can't solve any problem myopically. So address the structure, and take an all-in approach. This is why we say cities in India are equal opportunity offenders: they're screwing everybody. Not only the poor, but the poor as well. So we have to work on this together.

Summer Internship In the Swamp Rachel Rood-Ojalvo '19.5

Rachel is a junior Urban Studies concentrator focused on criminal justice reform, reentry, and understanding the racialization of city spaces. In Providence, she works with the community organization Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) to provide fair access to employment and public housing for people released from incarceration.

My internship search last spring started simply, with a quick Google search for “criminal justice reform in Washington D.C.” I found a small nonprofit, the Council for Court Excellence (CCE), with policy internships for undergraduates. With CCE’s full-time staff of only six people, I knew I’d do substantive work and develop personal relationships with my colleagues. I applied for Brown’s LINK award so I could afford food and housing with an unpaid internship. My grandparents used to live in D.C. so I grew up taking day trips there, but my familiarity with the gooey warmth of my grandmother’s homemade honey cake left much of the city to explore as a 21-year-old excited to bond with interns over policy reform and happy hour.



Photo: Rachel Rood-Ojalvo

CCE tasked me with research to improve D.C.’s Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA), which provides formerly incarcerated people with reentry services such as housing, employment, and official identification. As a district and not a state, D.C.’s government uniquely combines local and federal actors. This complicates the web of authority and accountability. To inform MORCA’s ongoing revamp, I studied the best (and worst) practices of other offices dedicated to reentry.

Working for CCE, I zipped around D.C.: to congressional hearings on Capitol Hill, to panel discussions at the Urban Institute, to Fraser Mansion (the national office of the Church of Scientology) for the Rethink Justice Coalition, and between the Department of Behavioral Health and the D.C. auditor. This running around also brought me to the Newsroom for a conference on the effects of mass incarceration on women and children. At the conference I eagerly listened to Congress members I admire, like Senators Kamala Harris and Cory Booker, explain the importance of fair sentencing legislation. Yet, I grew frustrated that the perspectives of formerly incarcerated women and their children were omitted. I wondered how to move forward in a way that centers the voices of those directly affected by the justice system we are trying to change.

I asked my colleagues about their experience and advice; they helped me navigate questions about continuing my education in public policy and law. I had Fridays off, so in true Urban Studies fashion I took long weekends to explore Washington D.C.: book talks, jazz in the sculpture gardens, a metro system worth comparing to the New York City subway, and ramen from Daikaya that rivals Ken’s in Providence.

Equally important, I left the neighborhood I lived in, the George Washington University bubble spanning the Northwest blocks from Trader Joe’s to Whole Foods. I crossed the Anacostia River and entered Southeast D.C., home to the majority of

the city’s people of color and, because of the racist structures that created mass incarceration, the highest arrest rates. Washington D.C. is 49% Black, but African-American males make up 96% of D.C.’s incarcerated population. This is not because Black people are criminals: it’s because Black people are criminalized. As I walked around Southeast, I sensed a tension between the government’s simultaneous neglect and hyper-surveillance. I passed no supermarkets but several police officers. I struggled with the knowledge that I was a tourist who could voluntarily leave at any time.

D.C. is currently planning to build a new jail, located in the Southeast quadrant. Another project at CCE is to ensure the plans include 1) Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion that replaces unfair sentencing with proper behavioral health services, 2) humane jail conditions, and 3) programming that prepares people for life post-incarceration. As I wandered through Southeast, I imagined the jail and its effects on the community. I felt conflicted about the decision between reform and revolution. For example, I know it is crucial to create prison conditions that do not force incarcerated folks to suffer over 100-degree heat without air conditioning like they endured last summer in the D.C. swamp humidity, but I also know that I don’t want a new jail to exist at all.

To combat injustice in the justice system, we need anti-racist urban geography that fights gentrification, that spawns neither poor communities of color nor the ease with which affluent white residents ignore existing disparities. I’m a prison abolitionist because prisons are supposed to deter crime and make society safer, but they do neither. Prisons are punitive, not rehabilitative. They oppress poor people of color and they lock people up instead of treating mental health and substance abuse issues. Thus, we need larger imaginations: imaginations that can conceive of a truly restorative justice system, that can create alternatives to incarceration, and that can think outside the box of a jail cell.

Visit to a Nuclear Power Plant John Beck '18

John is a senior in urban studies and co-leader of the Department Undergraduate Group

“Why don’t you go literally anywhere else in the world,” members of my family remarked. I had just finished describing my summer plans to visit Fukushima, Japan, with the Green Program and, as it turns out, visiting nuclear power plants, especially those that have accidentally released significant amounts of radiation, is not a popular idea among loved ones. I decided to go anyway.

I’ve always been interested in nuclear power. When I was younger, I would spend hours reading anything I could find about the Chernobyl disaster, followed by passionate interviews with any adult who was alive in 1986 when the catastrophe occurred. The idea that a city, in this case Pripyat in the Ukraine, could be evacuated and abandoned within hours due to a nuclear meltdown was horrific. Images of classrooms littered with open textbooks, a sign of the swift and unexpected evacuation, are a chilling reminder of the sometimes uncontrollable power of nuclear energy. Considering many nuclear power plants were originally built close to large met-

ropolitan areas, it is not difficult to imagine something similar happening in the United States. So, when the opportunity to visit Fukushima and learn more about nuclear power policy and disaster mitigation presented itself through the Green Program, I signed up immediately.

The Green Program runs educational programs for college students focused on pairing academic study of sustainable development with immersive cultural experiences. This was the Green Program’s first trip to Japan, specifically designed to study the political and cultural responses to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster. For the duration of the trip we studied nuclear power and disaster mitigation policy at the Fukushima National College of Technology in

Iwaki, Fukushima, while also visiting areas affected by high-levels of radiation in addition to the earthquake. Since the 2011 explosion, the majority of the exclusion zone surrounding the power plant has been reopened to residents and large swathes of towns that were washed away by the tsunamis have been repaved. In the town . . . [cont’d on p. 7]



Photo: Tokyo Electric Power Company

["Visit," continued from p. 6]

. . . of Hisanohama, freshly poured concrete sea walls have helped create a new buffer zone between the town and the sea. While the walls were created to mitigate potential storms in the future, the negative effect has been to remove much of the seaside town's ease of access to the water.

What struck me most about my visit was the largely untouched natural landscape; the eastern part of Fukushima prefecture faces the Pacific Ocean while the western faces the mountains. Still, reminders of the disaster were present throughout. Large white dosimeters were littered throughout the prefecture and dutifully reported ambient gamma radiation levels. While at first these dosimeters were somewhat surprising, their frequency and familiarity quickly made them fade into the surroundings of city life.

Some remnants of the disaster, while less obvious than a dosimeter, were far more unnerving. As we entered the remaining area around the power plant that is still closed to the public we saw what can only be described as a post-apocalyptic world. Abandoned restaurants and shops were falling apart, while car dealerships had broken windows, along with torn and faded advertisements and plants growing inside cars sporting 2011 sticker prices. Nearby, rice paddies, normally low to the ground and well kept, had turned into wild forests. Perhaps most alarming were the hundreds of black plastic bags filled with contaminated soil from across the prefecture that had been piled up along the road.

While the neighboring area was desolate of life and people, the power plant itself was filled with workers in blue uniforms continuing what has been a massive clean-up operation that is expected to go on for another 30 to 40 years. Dozens of contaminated cars were parked, all with their seats covered in plastic, alongside massive water containers filled with the contaminated water used to cool down the reactors. The forests immediately surrounding the power plant were taken down and completely paved over with concrete to avoid water runoff carrying contaminated soil to the sea. Only one of the three reactors that had a partial meltdown has been sheathed with a protective structure; the other two are still highly radioactive, and as we drove in between reactors two and three, gamma radiation levels reached over 300 mSv per hour. Our nearly hour-long visit, however, resulted in our only absorbing about .01 mSv of gamma radiation, roughly the equivalent radiation exposure of a dental x-ray.

Visiting the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear power plant was a harsh reminder of the power and dangers of nuclear energy. At the same time, however, local communities of Fukushima prefecture have worked together to restore vibrancy and life to the area. The festivals we participated in, the food we enjoyed and the people we met were all testament to the resiliency of the human spirit. I came back to the United States not overtly against nuclear power, but rather with a deeper understanding of both its dangers and usefulness.

Career Launch: A Letter

Ben Berke '16

I graduated in May 2016 as one of the lucky Urban Studies concentrators with a job lined up. Vaguely curious about journalism, I politely asked my future employer, an architecture firm in New Orleans, to delay my start to the beginning of September. I spent the summer applying for newspaper jobs with a cover letter I'd written in an hour and a half-dozen think pieces I'd written for the College Hill Independent. No one even replied.

That summer I also worked at the Seven Stars on Broadway to keep the lights on, and I'd send article pitches to a Providence Journal editor on my lunch breaks. The week I was due to leave for New Orleans, he finally threw me a bone and sent me to Newport to write about a rock band that neither of us had heard of. It was a special evening, but too little too late to change my mind.

The job in New Orleans started out exciting—interviewing climate refugees from a Cajun-Native American bayou community for a federally-funded resettlement project—but quickly devolved into a confusing high-pay, low-responsibility graphic design position. I wound up calling my one-time editor at the Providence Journal and asking if I could write book reviews remotely.

At the time, I was saving tons of money, paying cheap rent to live with friends in a big house with banana trees and a pool in a backyard. There were two legacy restaurants within a block that had zinc bars. Given the number of roommates and ridiculous amenities, our living situation was sort of a constant, slow-burning party. It was more fun than I'd had in college, but I found myself fleeing the scene regularly to write about bad books in empty cafes.

So, with my priorities barely clearer, I quit my job and flew to Providence so I could at least say that I had, at some point, given professional writing an earnest effort. I found an apartment on Federal Hill with two friends and got right to work profiling our neighbor, the Mad Peck. Our neighbor was, at various times and in various combinations, a published comic book historian, nationally-read culture critic, beloved doo-wop DJ, Christy's-auctioned visual artist, and a Brown University guest lecturer in television studies—the sort of man who could only really exist in Providence.

I got some nice emails the day it came out, which I read at Fellini's, the pizza place I'd started working at to subsidize my expensive journalism habit. The Fellini's crew was one of a kind. When my stuff started appearing regularly in the newspaper, my manager cut out my articles and taped them to the door of the walk-in fridge. The delivery guys were the best editors a budding newspaper reporter could ask for—funny, honest, and only interested so far as my articles were entertaining.

At Fellini's, I was definitely the rich kid—the "college boy"—but between getting shit from my co-workers and serving pizza to kids I went to Brown with, I was sufficiently humbled. It made it very easy to keep my head down and work hard on my stories.

There were days I went to the Providence Journal office at 9 a.m., filed a draft at 5 p.m., started making meatball subs at 6 p.m., and mopped up at 3 a.m.

Between the stress and the gross diet I probably doubled my cholesterol, but I was living the Providence dream. I'd listen to "My Way" by Frank Sinatra and feel like the lyrics justified my absurd career choices, which were slowly starting to pay off.

Writing about the arts in Providence is a really easy job. There's so much to cover. For an economically depressed city of 180,000, it's pretty ridiculous that I could find cool enough local connections to write about Rosmarie Waldrop, John Dwyer, Will Oldham, Victoria Ruiz, Alan Moore, Wendy Carlos, SJ Perelman, and Nathanael West.

For a while I was getting paid to attend public meetings as "Doc Brinker" for a monthly real estate column that ran alongside its inspiration—Bruce McCrae's "Phillipe and Jorge"—in Motif Magazine. The column was a blast and it led to an appropriately ridiculous connection that enhanced the journalism I wrote under my real name.

Humored by my column, former state representative Ray Rickman hired me to work at Stages of Freedom, his multipurpose bookstore, where I initiated a sale of a \$4,000 Richard Merkin painting on my second day and lasted two more before cracking a joke that compared Ray to Dilma Rousseff and got me fired.

Surprisingly, we stayed on good terms and, through Ray's gossip and book recommendations, I stumbled into a second beat at the Providence Journal covering the built environment through the lens of leftist history. When I wrote about Lippitt Hill—Providence's largest black neighborhood before its federally-funded destruction in 1961—Ray introduced me to a dozen of its former residents. When I heard a rumor that Rosa Parks' house might be disassembled and shipped to Providence, Ray already knew and told me who to call.

Careers take off slowly, and I certainly haven't made it but I've got momentum. I'm working on my first story for the Boston Globe. It's about an apartment complex in Brookline, Mass., but it's really about a futurist wool magnate's sustainable vision for 20th century Boston.

So a year and a half out of Brown, I finally have enough journalistic income to not work in the restaurant industry, but I do so with a heavy heart. I think most journalists learn to write against deadlines at a competitive media internship, but I learned at a pizza place in Providence. Proud of it, too.

Eyes Adjusting to Dystopia

Ruth Bamuwamye '19

The universe dropped me—an Urban Studies student, a black African woman, and a relentless wonderer—in Cape Town, South Africa to study at the University of Cape Town. I'm here for four months, I'm writing letters home, I'm taking a lot of adventures, and I'm collecting a lot of thoughts to bring home. Here are just a few.

On South Africa

Cape Town: it feels like the beginning of a dystopian novel. Truly. The good, the bad, and the ugly. The city crowds, particularly around the university, are beautiful, racially-scrambled. There also is an interesting display of multi-culturalism



Photo: Ruth Bamuwamye

(and latent segregation) in the diversity of races recognized in the country: white (English), white (Afrikaans), colored, Asian, Black (South African, Xhosa), Black (South African, Zulu), Black (non-South African), mixed, and so on. In class, students, professors, and the class' assigned authors all carry remarkably different names, but carefully and correctly pronounce them all: Thandi, John, Precious, Chinua, Mnotho, Taryn, Sage, Alma, Jens, and Sureya all mingle in conversation with a comfortable ease. Curiously, perhaps suspiciously, all my professors have bad coughs.

People are very fashionable, muted tones and effortless layers in winter, bright shades expected for summer, and no shortage of hip wire-framed glasses. They are very aware, if not standing in steely recognition of, the horrors and injustice of their Apartheid past. Now, imagine the Hunger Games' Capital District or the Community in the Giver.

On Names

To continue on names, South Africa is filled with them. Everyone is able to pronounce everyone else's, and it is commonplace—even pragmatic—to ask about pronunciation. It feels here like every single name is worthy of intentional and careful pronunciation and equal attention. This fact is what really sticks out about foreign students, shameless mispronunciations and "I can't even pronounce that" are commonly heard in American accents everywhere here. It takes me back to being a kid in the US with a last name like "Bamuwamye." I took mispronunciations and the occasional, "I'm not even going to try to pronounce that" as part of being different from others. Here I wonder if maybe that's not true; South Africans of every race and accent are able to pronounce my name after I introduce myself. They are also able to pronounce Gugulethu (City in the Western Cape), Khayelethsha (Township outside of Cape Town), Hlangani (UCT Admissions Office), Groote Schuur (UCT's Teaching Hospital), and isiXhosa—with the click (a native language of the area). Here, linguistic differences are both recognized and legitimized through pronunciation and presence. In contrast to the United States, where the typical way to deal with difference is to anglicize, nickname, or change them altogether -- from slavery, to colonialism, to Ellis Island, to kindergarten classrooms. I think I'm going to start holding people accountable for names.

On Dystopia

I'm having this feeling, the feeling that Cape Town is dystopian, because I am an outsider in a new city that is eerily similar but noticeably different to my own. Which sheds new light on the idea of urban political dystopia in film and literature: it exists to place a magnifying glass on our own lives. Every modern urban center is a dystopia.

Blogging the Benefit Street Arsenal

Francesca Gallo '20

I spent this summer and September working as Program Coordinator with the new organization, Doors Open Rhode Island. Doors Open held its inaugural, biannual, citywide open house festival this September as a culmination of a year of small, space-specific programming throughout Providence. Spaces like the Benefit Street Arsenal, Barnaby Castle, and Atlantic Mills welcomed over 4,000 visitors to learn their stories. Doors Open's mission is to connect people to local places of cultural, historical, and architectural significance to bridge communities and inspire new perspectives on our cities.

Through welcoming the public into spaces at the heart of our communities, Doors Open believes we can strengthen the connections between people and the places around them, transforming Rhode Island residents into advocates for our built environment. In addition to helping plan for and execute an open house event at the Sons of Jacob Synagogue and the September festival, I also composed blog posts throughout the summer through touring different festival sites and speaking to their ambassadors. The following is an excerpt from one of those original posts (viewable in full, along with many others, at doorsopenri.org/blog).

The Benefit Street Arsenal: 176 Years at 176 Benefit Street

A blog post for Doors Open Rhode Island (abridged)

"The army is always reorganizing," General Richard Valente repeats to me with a knowing smile. We sit together in the ground-floor room of the Benefit Street Arsenal, which once served as the training space of the Providence Marine Corps of Artillery (PMCA). The General describes a civil war era newspaper photograph depicting cannons lining the north wall of the drill floor. Today, the walls are decorated with grand military portraits and prints, American flag bunting, and wooden plaques with gold writing commemorating each battle in which the PMCA and 103rd Field Artillery have fought. The dark wood moldings and pale green walls

become the space of military history as General Valente walks me around the room, with his small-stepped, military gait and hands folded neatly behind his back.

The Arsenal was constructed in 1842. The PMCA was initially in charge of construction, but the state assumed ownership of the building for \$600 within the year, after the group ran out of money. The PMCA now holds the Arsenal on a long-term lease from the state. In 1906, to make way for a Providence Railroad tunnel, the New Haven Railroad paid to move the Arsenal 100 yards north up Benefit Street to where it sits today. Constant reorganization.

General Valente is thorough as he outlines the history of the Arsenal and the PMCA. The Providence Marine Society, a reinsurance company for local ship owners, received its state charter to form a volunteer marine company of artillery in 1801. "The Providence Marine Society felt that cannons would be much better insurance than a piece of paper," General Valente chuckles. In the 1820s, the PMCA converted from naval- to land-based artillery and were among the first to answer President Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers at the onset of the Civil War. Since then, the PMCA has been incorporated into the National Guard under many titles, and the Arsenal and PMCA now house veterans' affairs for the 103rd Field Artillery.

The historical reorganizations of the PMCA are reflected within the curated, mazelike rooms of the Arsenal. Arranged in glass display cabinets, spread across tables and couches, and hung on the walls

in rows reaching to the ceiling, are artifacts from virtually every battle fought by PMCA soldiers. A World War One uniform with a 103rd Field Artillery metal button nestled below the collar; a 1916 War Department rating of 87 National Guard Artillery batteries with Rhode Island's A battery in the top position by over 3,000 points; the first four shell casings fired by the 103rd Artillery during the Iraq War signed by all the soldiers present.

General Valente leads me meticulously through each room, pausing his explanations when I take photographs, and setting himself on the edges of tables and chair arms for longer stories. In the coming months, the General plans to reorganize some of the more jumbled display areas according to year, convert one of the upstairs rooms into a military library of donated books, and install a World War One exhibit in the former training room downstairs.

Walking out of the Arsenal after my tour, through the monumental wooden double doors, I am reminded of what the General has told all 103rd units going overseas since his appointment:



Photo: Providence Historical Society

"Those doors that you're going to go out through tonight have seen some of the best artillerymen in the U.S. Army walk through the same doors for the past 160 years."