PREFACES

A GUIDE FOR PLANNERS OF COLOR

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ABOUT PREFACES

Prefaces was created as an act of solidarity. As urban planning and its related fields continue to grow, the professions must be inclusive of young practitioners from underrepresented backgrounds and provide resources to ensure that they succeed. Those from underrepresented backgrounds, including but not limited to, people of color, students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation students, women, and LGBTQ-identifying individuals, carry a passion for creating more just and livable communities. However, these individuals find that even after years of formal education, they may have not been provided with the tools required to achieve their career goals and objectives.

Prefaces is both a creative and practical guide that prepares young and underrepresented planners for their entry into the planning profession. Through the voices of planning professionals from underrepresented backgrounds, this guide shares advice, strategies, and narratives on topics around the following four key themes: 1) Finding the right graduate program, considering identity and fit; 2) Making the most out of your graduate school experience; 3) Preparing for and entering the job market; 4) How to be happy and successful in the field of urban planning.

Prefaces is a living document; we are continually creating and looking for resources to share. If you have a personal story, artwork, poetry, or general advice that you would like to share, feel free to connect with us—we are always looking to collaborate and expand this guide. Planners and students of color, those who identify with other underrepresented groups, and allied professionals are encouraged to submit. Visit www.PrefacesGuide.com for details.

This first issue of Prefaces is a sample of what is to come. In it you will find a few essays and interviews providing insight on some of the hardships and successes of planners from underrepresented backgrounds. While our website will be updated throughout the year, our next major issue will be released in Spring 2019 and will include another round of unique voices.

Luis R. Gonzalez

LEARNING TO VALUE AND LEVERAGE LIFE EXPERIENCES

I never thought graduate school would be for me. Truthfully, I didn't even know what it was until a few months into my freshman year in college. Neither of my parents made it past the 11th grade, so the idea of schooling after college was confusing to them since I wasn't going into medicine or law. It was almost as confusing as every conversation we've had about what planning entails--and yes, we're still working through that, but that's a totally different conversation.

Planning programs can be intimidating spaces. At the graduate level, students aren't always told how valuable their lived experiences are unless they can be written down and quantified on a resume or job application. This puts many students of color—particularly first generation, foreign-born, and/or low-income ones—in what can often times feel like (or truly be) a point of disadvantage. While we're all individuals with unique experiences, it was clear to me from my first two days as a planning student that I had been living a vastly different reality than the majority of my peers. A reality that many of the people in my circles experienced, yet has been dismissed by society at large.

Still, there I was sitting in an auditorium of those who would be my peers for two years. Two of the most exhausting and debilitating years of my life because they constantly made me question the validity of my experiences. Yet in those moments of listening to my professors speak about the school's accolades, curriculum, and whatever else I probably forgot within an hour, I was one of the most eager and confident people in the building. I had a thirst for knowledge driven by the lack of opportunity that my family and friends had. Failure was not an option.

I wanted to be a change agent and advocate for those whose voices have been repressed. I wasn't sure how I would do it, but I knew that planning school would provide me with the appropriate tools. After all, I was attending a top-rated program that was consistently in the same conversations as schools like Columbia and MIT. However, it didn't take

too long for the hard knocks to begin.

During the program's orientation, there was a short recess for lunch and for new students to get to know each other. Within that period I learned that most of my peers were white, fairly young, and new to the area. Having graduated from a predominantly white institute, none of this was new to me. Yet within moments my confidence began to shrink as the conversation shifted to the topics of educational background and prior experience.

Suddenly it was clear that I wasn't talking to people from the Bay Area or Cambridge, but U.C. Berkeley and Harvard graduates who had worked at consulting firms for a couple of years before applying to graduate programs. I on the other hand attended a university in upstate New York that they had never heard of and graduated only four months prior to those conversations. I felt small. I was more aware than ever about the gap between us. Sure, despite their backgrounds we all ended up attending the same program, but I couldn't help but feel like they knew something that I didn't.

Feelings aside, the day went on and after some hours I had my first class, History and Theory of Planning. While I had taken a similar class as an undergrad, I figured it would be different this time around. During the session, we reviewed the syllabus and while looking it over something stood out to me: there was no mention of communities of color and race was only noted in one of the final weeks of the course, for one reading.

When it came time for questions I made sure to bring it up and as soon as I finished my question I heard whispers. Doubts filled the room. The professor gave me the run-around and my confidence crumbled. I maintained my cool and listened to other students ask questions with almost encyclopedic-precision. Terms I had never heard before were thrown around and the professor gave other students more elaborate answers than he did me, referring to weeks when we'd dive into those topics and other readings they may want to check out in the meantime. It was clear to me that I had been invalidated as one of the only non-white voices in the room.

A similar set of interactions repeated the next day. This time around it was during an Urban Redevelopment course, but luckily there were no whispers following my question. As class progressed I began to doubt my place in the program.

Was I ready to take classes with some of the smartest academics in the field? Was I ready for the workload? Was I even qualified or smart enough for all this?

As the questions raced through my mind, the topic of urban poverty came up in the class. Particularly, what effects could be felt today from early redevelopment efforts. The room fell silent and the professor fished for input only to have a response from someone who worked at a local non-profit and spoke on their experience conducting surveys in lower-income neighborhoods. I was dumbfounded.

Though many of my classmates were proud and educated left-leaning aspiring urbanites, few could engage in thoughtful discourse about some of the most basic urban issues. I, on the other hand, had been surrounded and affected by those issues my whole life. It didn't take long for me to catch on to why my classmates had little to contribute to the topic. They had little experience with it; I could speak on urban poverty because I lived it.

And so I spoke.

Then another class went by and a similar moment happened….then another….and so on. A few months into graduate school I was still a bit quiet, but it was becoming apparent to me that my experiences couldn't be invalidated. While my peers and professors were busy reading or writing about topics like gentrification, transportation deserts, and poor housing conditions, these were the truths I had been learning to navigate through for years. Beyond forming my worldview, my experiences were an asset. However, I'd never really thought of them as that. Instead, moments spent discussing local issues with neighbors, such as the lack of healthy food options in the area, would become forgotten conversations. I had no idea that my experiences could be used for my advancement, both in and outside of the classroom.

During a regular discussion with my adviser, it became clear that my experiences could contribute to my professional trajectory. As a student, I made it my business to schedule regular meetings with professors whose research or classes interested me. Luckily, my adviser was one of those people and sometime into my first semester she hastily brought up a research project she was working on. The project involved food deserts in the local neighborhood and somehow I mentioned my anecdotal experience on the subject based on where I had grown up and the phenomenon also being present near my alma mater. The

conversation quickly changed course from my adviser trying to get through all of my questions to her wanting to dig deeper into my experience and ultimately her offering me a position on the project. Unbeknownst to me, the tools I needed for this minor win were in me the whole time.

For a while, reflecting on my first few days of graduate school angered me. The combination of not being as familiar with planning jargon as many of my peers and not having professors engage with my questions or validating my life as experience shot my confidence. However, I've since made peace by accepting that in a field where similar voices have historically guided conversations, my experiences are authentic and present nuances that often go undiscussed.

Additionally, learning to truly value and leverage my life experiences meant immersing myself in the vocabulary that comes with planning school. Indeed, one of my professors best described it when he confessed that the nomenclature in planning programs is maddening at best. From BIDs to TIFs, schools throw a lot of industry jargon at students that can be intimidating at first. Nevertheless, the terms are important for understanding how planning works and can be used to reframe—and reclaim—our personal experiences. Though it took me months to understand this and come to terms with it, it made all the difference in my graduate experience.

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Addison Vawters

PENN TREATY

*W*e're sitting on the camel's back surveying the desert from our bird's eye view. The sun is setting out in front of us. He says it's been a really special time getting to know one another more closely during the course of the trip, sharing whiskey on the porch during the night deluge, Sonoran hot dogs, making melody together along the spines of the saguaro.

And an illustration I'm fond of comes into my interior vision. It is of a stern and curmudgeonly looking sparrow, delicately painted in oils, with a seriffed caption that reads "I'd sell you to Satan for one corn chip." I turn and look into his twinkling blue eyes and say, It's been nice getting to know you too.

Part One

1. Was I interested in urbanism before I was interested in farming? No, it was moving into a town with a distinctive social character like, Gainesville Florida, somewhere with a downtown that I wanted to be, with downtown personalities. This urban geography, which I remember entirely in diaphanous tones of sun flare, navel orange, swamp green, ripped denim, and malt liquor, spotted by anarchist bookstores, punk garages, and backyard gardens set the backdrop for my personal, romantic, and political development.

Don't @ me.

2. As Dr. T explained peak oil, the inherent dangers of industrial farming vis a vis mega pests, famine by crop failures, Michael Pollan, the rising median age of farmers, it became clear to me that we were all going to die of starvation and that no one seemed to understand or care. I looked over at N's dirty hands and forearms, the muscles dusted by soft brown hair, flexing as they hurriedly took notes. They read, "something about ecofeminism, the relationship of women to the earth, consumer activism is fucking bullshit and will be the end of us."

It was clear in that moment that solving the crisis of modern agriculture required my lifelong devotion and that I needed to accompany N on their next volunteer shift at a friend's boutique organic farm where we could discuss our shared vision of a Marxist agrarian revolution while I further admired their forearms and whatever other parts they might choose to expose under the high spring sun.

That Saturday, early in the morning, dew still on the grass, we climbed into N's Truck and drove out past the city limit into Alachua, along the highland ridge known for its fertile farmland.

Beautiful K, brown, soft voice, gave us each a small paring knife and a bucket of potatoes and delicately instructed us on how to search for small eyes in the mottled copper skin, cut them out, and plunge them into the expectant earth. He guided us between rows of mounded earth now pregnant with new eyes and showed us how to gracefully and efficiently side dress each mound, by hand, with organic fertilizer. Later we ate lunch at a long and wooden dining table in the middle of a field of sunflowers and gerbera daisies.

3. K's farm was situated on land owned by old family friends (their in-laws, at the time). When K and R split, the families agreed the farm would continue. N, T, K, M&M, were all able to find a land arrangement that worked for them, but, it was always someone else's land. How would young people save the world from industrial farming if they, if I, couldn't afford to own farmland in or out of the city? What would a life queer ruralism look like? I wasn't quite prepared to find out. I wanted to farm in the city, where my friends were, were queer. I had a few questions though. How was the land value determined? Who had the power to decide the highest and best use, the allowable use, the zoning of an urban plot, what factors influenced land value?

Part Two

1. I walked into the middle of the park where William Penn was fabled to have purchased Philadelphia from the Lenni Lenape tribe. I settled into the grass and fixated on the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, illuminated in pink that night. Behind me loomed the abandoned, dark and grand shell of the classically styled Pennsylvania Electric Company Delaware Power Plant. I watched G as they approached from the far end of the park. In their hands, they carried a bottle of homemade mead and a handmade baguette meant to impress me. I hadn't realized it was a

date.

"How long do think you'll live in Philadelphia?"

"Only a year longer maybe. I plan on going to grad school for urban planning."

"Wow, same, why is urban planning so gay? Another friend just yesterday shared that they wanted to study urbanism."

"Queers are governmentalized and politicised the moment their identity is revealed to them. I think it leads a lot of us into the biopolitical field, government, nonprofit, development, and social policy-oriented work. I've been talking to some cuties that go to Pratt, and it seems like Pratt and Hunter are the two progressive planning programs in NYC. While we're drawn to the planning field, as a profession it's still pretty white and unimaginative, so the program professors, and colleagues you choose to surround yourself with matters."

"I guess I'll see you at Pratt then."

Part Three

1. Post final presentations at the usual forsaken watering hole I'm told they are out of Flower Power, my fave beer, there. After taking a PBR I struggle to find comfort on a small an ill-constructed cube posing as bar seating. The rotation of Nicki Minaj, Drake, and Ariana Grande's Christmas and Chill soothe my irritation.

"You guys, I got a job! PWL recommended me for AB's Director of Urban Policy and Planning and they're best buds. He's' also met with me a bunch of times now. I'm actually still waiting to hear back but I'm pretty sure it's in the bag"

I smile at L with genuine glee while a tingling sensation spreads over the back of my head and through my intestines. I immediately began working out how they, had secured my dream position, and I, during the same course of study, in the same course of time, had failed. They had secured the right fellowships, they didn't balk at work even when fellowships were exploitative of. When offered extra work they weren't protective of their free time. They got in front of the right people. This white girl was also charming as fuck and I felt like every white woman in my program had conspired to help her because they saw themselves

in her. Who is going to see themselves in me? In 30 years I have literally never worked or studied under a queer person of color. Professors regularly call me by another name, the name of the other person of color. It's spring and I have a full summer and fall to find a job and finish my thesis.

2. G & D message me on Instagram, D looks familiar. I realize I know them from Miami. I click through to their Instagram page and through the link in their bio. Theories of infrastructure, urbanism, Keller Easterling, special economic zones, art project, which turns out to be their thesis. They can't meet up this week because they're traveling to Panama to present on some concept from their project, they can't meet up next week because they're leading an online reading group and discussion, (does this couple actually want to go on a date?) They've transmuted their thesis into a lectures, presentations, travel opportunities, reading groups, art installations, a gallery show, a publication.

I remember each individual instance a professor encouraged us to take it easy on the thesis, just get it done. It's not important. In retrospect I shouldn't have guarded my free time, I shouldn't have had free time. D now has your dream job at UDL.

3. That evening we take the meeting on a rooftop in the Lower East Side. After a few glasses of wine at summer dusk I tear up as S smacks their fist into their other hand while relaying the conversation they had with their supervisor earlier that day - "you thought you knew what racism in the workplace looks like, but this is what it actually looks like, and you never thought you would be taking part in it but you are, and that convulsive, oozing, sinking pain and fire in your stomach that you feel? this is how it feels, for both you and for me. It fucking sucks."

I didn't find this in school, granted I don't think I knew I needed it quite yet. A small group of brilliant friends of color, we would all change New York City. We would all cry and cheer for one another. Their community was the best form of self-care.

Addison Vawters grew up internationally, completing studies in international politics and city planning. They are currently a New York City based urbanist working in the field of cultural organizing with an interest in the role of art and technology in creating equitable cities. Their other interests include writing, farming, carpentry, and design.

Emily Ahn Levy

PLACE**KEEPING**: MY VALUES AND MY WHY

WTF is Creative Placemaking?
On a warm Arizona desert evening in April 2016, I sat on the floor with fellow urban planning and placemaking classmates and professor Caron Atlas, our bodies and mental capacities nearly depleted. The day was full of stimuli beginning with a series of discussions with Phoenix-based grassroots community leaders who practice cultural organizing around the US-Mexico border with transgender and undocumented communities, then we caravaned to Tucson where we went on a walking tour about the cultural identity and community-initiated water management of Dunbar Heights. Afterwards, we drove out to the Sonoran Desert and were invited to participate in artist Kimi Eisele's Standing with Saguaros, a site-responsive workshop in Saguaro National Park and Tucson celebrating the saguaro cactus. During the expansive sunset in the desert, we learned that the saguaro cactus is considered an icon, ancestor, food source, shelter, ecological marker, friend, and fellow community member. Being in a place as seemingly barren and unfamiliar gave me an opportunity to see through a new lens, one that sharpened my awareness that multiple rich cultures and identities exist there. We too often see and judge an environment or culture based solely on our existing positions and ideologies, and are blind to the deep culture and historical social significance that lies just beneath the surface.

That evening our class was invited to a discussion with Roberto Bedoya, then the Executive Director of the Tucson Pima Arts Council. He asked: "Is placemaking a property value rights movement or is placemaking a human rights movement?" Despite feeling exhausted, my spine straightened and my focus zeroed in as I intuited that the unfolding conversation would be important to tune in to, as it would relate to our class and my overall education and understanding of placemaking. Bedoya's question resonated with the distinctions I was grappling with in my classes as I was shaping my understanding of

placemaking and its potential unintended consequences. During the conversation, Bedoya challenged the parameters of discrimination, unveiling instances where placemaking took a predatory approach and was complicit in gentrification and displacement of people and culture. He stressed the importance of the integration of human rights in our evolving placemaking practices and policies. Planners and placemakers must name this and genuinely redirect focus to people not property and profit. And these people-centered practices, much of what we had observed earlier that day, must be supported and initiated from within existing communities in the making of and keeping of place. Placekeeping, yes! Finally someone was speaking a language I could understand! Once I returned to New York City, I read Bedoya's writing. In his 2013 article "Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Dis-belonging," he writes, "A troubling tenor of creative placemaking discourse is the avoidance of addressing social and racial injustices at work in society and how they intersect with creative placemaking projects."

This critical viewpoint of creative placemaking helped me understand the disconnect in my graduate program. Social, class and racial injustices are ever present in our society, in our cities, and in our publics. To ignore, silence, and avoid these injustices is troubling and perpetuates discrimination, oppression, and violence.

Here is a story from my first semester: In our studio class we were tasked with analyzing public spaces in the neighborhood, which is continuing to undergo many forms of neighborhood, social, class and racial change. In class discussions and presentations, I consistently brought up these changes and the resulting tensions that were brought up by the folks we interviewed. Unfortunately my findings were repeatedly dismissed by one of the professors. In one class he said, "You get this [discussion] in another class. Let's not focus on this here." The other class is titled Democracy, Equity and Public Space - so yes, indeed we discussed these very real issues in that class but I knew that they must be discussed throughout all of our classes and our work if we are going to practice equitable community research and urban planning. In this first semester class, an unpleasant teacher-student, expert-novice, white man-non white woman dynamic pervaded the classroom which weighed on me heavily. I didn't yet feel I had the power to directly respond by calling out the professor's censorship, so I instead continued to bring up these important findings in the following classes which eventually engaged other students and another professor in discussion.

I believe that by sticking to my values and through persistence, a deeper layer of inquiry and thought began to emerge.

Outside of the classroom and In the Context of My Thesis Research

How can these injustices be intentionally addressed in our creative placemaking practices and cultural policy? And how do these relate to gentrification and displacement? Today gentrification and displacement is happening all over the world, in both urban and rural environments, and in places in between. In cities in the United States, working-class immigrant communities of color have been most impacted through historical systems, policies, and actions. From a racial justice frame, these communities were first devalued and criminalized, disinvested in, and abandoned. The process of gentrification is only possible through the devaluing and revaluing of land and people. It is connected to globalized systems of advanced capitalism and neoliberal privatization of our publics (Smith 1996), supported by government policies and zoning (Angotti 2016), which now results in hyper-speed neighborhood change, which leads to the displacement of people, jobs and culture.

Gentrification and displacement is experienced in a spectrum of ways, no one person's experience and feelings are identical to another's. For some of us, we have witnessed and struggled against displacement our entire lives. Others carry differing degrees of trauma and "root shock" which affect the ways they interact with their urban environment and people today (Fullilove 2004). Others have just arrived, looking for economic refuge or safe asylum. We cannot assume people's experiences based on appearances. Though we can learn and unlearn from listening to others' experiences and feelings. In the many conversations I've had as part of my research with residents, cultural organizers and activists, I have heard the following:

"Gentrification is not inevitable."

"Gentrification is not community development."

"Gentrification is ethnic cleansing."

"Displacement is the replacement of people for profit."

"Displacement is erasure of culture."

"Why is it assumed that [we] don't want nice things."

"Gentrification is pain."

"Gentrification is tied to immigration. Gentrification is forced

displacement. A gentrified space is not a safe place."

"Displacement is violence."

"What is the role of arts and culture in regards to gentrification and displacement in urban cities in the United States? Can arts and culture be leveraged to help curb gentrification or is it [often] appropriated exploited and packaged to revitalize for gentrify a neighborhood?"

These comments provide a clear and important counter narrative to the dominant discourse of "gentrification is inevitable," and they challenge the assumption that go that gentrification is progress. This is the starting point for my research.

As a graduate student of Pratt Institute's Urban Placemaking and Management program's inaugural class, I reflected personally and publicly in the classroom on a series of questions: What is creative placemaking's role in gentrification and displacement, as a field which is at the intersection of community development, social arts practice, and philanthropic funding? Is creative placemaking a neoliberal mechanism by which art and culture are appropriated, exploited and packaged by developers for the purpose of marketing the "creative city"? Is creative placemaking complicit in gentrification and the displacement of people and culture (Smith 1996, Zukin 2010, Nicodemus 2012, Starowitz 2016, NYCNot4Sale 2016)? What are the psychological impacts of displacement on a community and an individual (Fullilove 2014)?

These questions led me to more questions about the city's role: Is top-down city planning and developer-driven urban revitalization problematic because of the unbalanced power dynamics? Who benefits and who is making the decisions (Mehta 2012)? How might community-led processes and practices be more productive (Atlas 2013, Bedoya 2015, CUP 2016, Tanscheit 2016, Turner 2017)? Might creative placemaking also be a method and practice of naming gentrification and genuinely building from within a community's existing culture and keeping their sense of place (Atlas 2017, PolicyLink 2017)? How do we both celebrate and preserve an existing community's culture? Can placekeeping (Bedoya 2014) be a practice of dialogue, expression, action, and healing rooted in resilience and resistance?

My research focuses on two working-class immigrant communities to address these questions: New York City's Manhattan Chinatown and Los Angeles' Boyle Heights, where threats of gentrification and

displacement are aggressive from many angles. In both neighborhoods there are powerful community-led and people-centered anti-displacement resistance movements from within low-income immigrant communities of color. These communities have practiced decades of resiliency, and they contribute to the city's rich arts and cultural production and landscape. These intersectional movements include people who are long-term and newer [displaced] residents, artists, educators, small business-owners, organizers, and allies in resistance of the greater forces of gentrification and displacement. These include the Chinatown Working Group, CAAAV Chinatown Tenant Union, Chinatown Art Brigade, W.O.W. Project, Coalition to Protect Chinatown & the Lower East Side, B.H.A.A.A.D, LA Tenants Union, Union de Vecinos, Defend Boyle Heights, The Undeportables, Espacio 1839, and others. My research seeks to understand the ways these communities practice placekeeping through discussing and documenting their community-led processes (CCCE 2013), rasquachificiation (Bedoya 2014), everyday insurgent spatial practices (Hou 2010), cultural organizing and direct actions (Arts & Democracy 2017).

My Values and My Why as a Practitioner

There is a definitive need for more discussions of race, class, power, and privilege when it comes to planning, arts and culture practice, and placemaking. I believe in pluralism, that there is never one singular narrative or one singular way of working (Davidoff 1965, Sandercock 1998). I also believe there are historical systems of oppression and inequity (racism, capitalism and classism, patriarchy, imperialism and colonialism) and structural forces (unjust policing, inequitable zoning and housing policies, restricted public space access, and unequal access to other resources and amenities) that exist in our present, affecting people's lives with whom we share spaces, language, community and resources; and therefore, we must always ask "who is this for, who benefits? Who has the decision-making power? Who is 'we'? Who is 'they'?, etc. We must remain critical and not complacent about processes, decisions and their impacts, especially as people with educational and professional privileges. We must engage and employ democratic public will.

As a cultural organizer and ever-evolving practitioner, I use value-based and inquiry-based approaches to my work. Therefore I believe it is vital to understand my own values and my why. My practice and values are

shaped from a lifelong journey of deeply exploring and un/learning my identity and positionality in this world as a transnational and transracial Korean American adoptee and queer femme of color. I was born in South Korea to a working-class poor family, and as an infant I was relinquished to the international adoption system. I migrated to the United States, and I grew up in a household with class, race and citizenship privileges. Through this loss of my biological family, my cultural heritage (language, food, customs, history) was also erased.

As a young adult I returned to live in Korea, and I reclaimed some aspects of the culture as my own. During this time, I reunited with my Korean biological family and I listened to their stories of struggle with poverty and the love they have for one another. I have come to know the interrelated stories of family members, other international adoptees, and birth mothers. My returning to live in Korea was a radical act of self understanding and self-determination. I feel that I am more aware, tuned in, and capable of practicing compassion and empathy with a wide range of people across all types of differences. It is also where I learned about the destruction and pain caused by systems of oppression which perpetuate the international adoption industry such as racism, militarism, colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. And through this, I realize that these same systems bring destruction and pain to all forms of communities and that these systems must be struggled against in order to dismantle, liberate and rebuild.

I stand in solidarity with working-class migrants and those affected by the DACA repeal, as well as those communities under threat of and who have experienced dispossession and displacement. I understand that the model myth minority perpetuates anti-blackness by both rewarding and falsely stereotyping Asians-Americans; and I reject being a model minority and I stand in solidarity with black and brown communities for liberation and peace. These communities are where I have found belonging. Our work is a process of cultural organizing and community-led cultural making to amplify and reclaim our culture and sense of place through expression, dialogue, and healing. This is both personal and political. This is my why; the why I do this work.

This essay is an edited excerpt of Emily Ahn Levy's thesis in fulfillment of her M.S. in Urban Placemaking and Management, entitled "Placekeeping in Practice: Resisting the Displacement of People and Culture in New York City's Manhattan Chinatown and Los Angeles' Boyle Heights" (2017).

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TIFFANY-ANN TAYLOR

This is an abridged version of our conversation with Tiffany-Ann Taylor. Visit www.prefacesguide.com to read the full version.

Tiffany-Ann Taylor is an Assistant Vice President at the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC). She works in the Ports & Transportation division on transformative projects that impact passenger transportation throughout New York City. Prior to working at NYCEDC, Tiffany worked in suburban and regional planning for the Department of Economic Development and Planning, in Suffolk County, New York. She holds a B.A in Government from The College of William & Mary and a M.S in City & Regional Planning from Pratt Institute. Tiffany is a Co-Chair of the APA New York Metro Chapter Diversity Committee.

Why did you decide to pursue a career in planning?

I'm from Long Island, New York—the suburbs. I knew of Robert Moses and where I'm from he's praised for giving us parks, parkways, and people think he's amazing. That's how I grew up. Nobody ever believes me, but there's a bronze (life-sized) statue of him two towns away from where I grew up. I never knew that his work had a negative impact on people and neighborhoods until much later in my education, but I always knew that his work was impactful. I went to college in Virginia and in my last semester I took an urban sociology class where we learned about how cities and neighborhoods change, what attracts certain groups, why people leave, and the cannon of thinkers who've been thinking about this in the last fifty years. It was the first time I realized that you could study cities and that this was a thing. That class was the first time I heard of urban planning as a profession. I was really interested in the class, but didn't decide be a planner at that time, instead, after graduation I worked in law firms focused on disability and personal injury cases, as well as a non-profit. At some point I decided that I really want to do work that's helpful for people, but I knew I couldn't work on the front lines. I wear my heart on my sleeve, I'd go home crying, and it wouldn't have worked out. I read the book Gig, which is a collection of interviews with people about their job,

and in there somewhere I found 'urban planner.' I remember reading the interview and thinking, 'Huh I like this, this sounds like it could be me.' Then later on I applied and got into grad school to study urban planning.

In my first semester we did a mini-studio and our client was Youth Ministries for Peace & Justice, in the South Bronx. The studio group was separated into smaller subject teams (e.g. housing, transportation, etc.) and I was randomly put in the transportation group. Looking back at it, one of the first things I noticed was that the only subway line available in that area is the 6 train, with elevated stations, three flights of steps and no elevator. The main commercial corridor is separated into four lanes because the support beams of the elevated line split the road. I remember thinking that if I had a stroller, crutches, or a wheelchair, how would I get up and down these steps? What if there was snow, how would I maneuver?

I remember having to watch the buses as they rode in and out of the center roadway. Since the bus stop was physically on the sidewalk, pedestrians would walk over the service lane and into the center of the roadway to look down the street in order to see if the bus was coming—as New Yorkers do. I remember thinking how dangerous this was, especially if drivers can't see you. At that time there were no green [borough] cabs and the yellow cabs weren't out there, so the only available service was the black livery cabs, which were few and far between and expensive. So I thought about all these variables and considered that maybe transportation is something I want to study, maybe I could really make a difference. I don't have to necessarily be on the front-line, but I could work on a project where at the end of year I would've made an impact on somebody's life, and that's how I fell into transportation planning specifically.

As a planner of color, what did you deal with in planning school and in the profession that your other peers might not have experienced?

I could definitely speak more to that professionally, but in school people expect your voice to be representative of the people you look like. So, you're black therefore your voice represents all black people or that you may find yourself defending all black people because you're black. I definitely experienced that as an undergraduate as well—I went

to a predominantly white school. Professionally I've unfortunately experienced all the -isms, sexism, racism, ageism.. I experienced my pedigree being doubted, (meaning where I went to school) no one ever asked my white colleagues that, my lived experience not being valued, being paid lower but expected to do more. I experienced being expected to do more "housework," like catering, logistics, cleaning up, and getting coffee.

I think everyone experiences doubt, but probably not to the degree in which I did. There were times both in planning school and professionally that I experienced doubt so intensely that I said to myself, 'I probably made a terrible decision in being an urban planner. Going to graduate school was probably a bad idea, I'm not good at this, all of my ideas are terrible, maybe I'm not really smart enough.' I know we probably all have those doubts, but I think it was amplified for me and I don't think my peers experience that.

Do you think some of that came from being a woman of color— probably one of the few black women, if not the only, in the room?

Yeah, I never met another black female in planning until I did an APA Mentorship program in 2015. That was only because in my application I specifically requested a black woman and she's still my mentor to this day.

I think that much of what I experience is not conscious bias. A lot of it is unconscious and the stereotype of black women being a workhorse in general is absolutely something that I have experienced in various jobs.. I think that the stereotype that minorities should be thankful for what they get and just to be invited plays out in the workplace. I think that when I do ask for more, others feel threatened. I think that being the only person that looks like me in a room is absolutely the reason I've been sent to certain meetings.

What's something that you know now, but wish you would have known earlier?

I wish I had known how dynamic I am, professionally. I wish I'd have known that at some point people would be willing to pay me for my opinion and perspective. I wish I'd have known that I have a lot of power and a lot of it comes from my presence. Purple hair aside, I have alway been told that my presence and personality enter the room

before I do, and I always attributed that to physically being this tall, plus-sized, black woman in a space where that typically doesn't exist. So that made sense to me. I always took it as 'here's this one thing that's not like the others' so naturally you're the center of attention. But actually it's not that—it's a part of it but not the core. The core is that people can sense my star quality before I open my mouth. It can be incredibly intimidating, which I think was the problem with some of my previous managers—they were threatened by it. But I say all that to say that you can take that 'other' and the presence and star quality and mix it to make power. You now have people that volunteer their time and want to lead by you. You know have people that have a whole caseload but want to volunteer their time to spend an entire day with you at a conference. Just by being that thing, right? I didn't recognize that I have that; I've consistently been made to feel less than.

I think it stems from the fact that at the time, Pratt's planning curriculum was not heavy on the technical stuff, but great at policy and 'feelings'—the soft skills. I came into the professional world with a technical deficiency, and I've always recognized that. When you work in transportation, which is typically male dominated, I feel as though soft skills aren't respected as much because in my experience men in this field tend to value hard skills over soft skills. So if i'm coming in and feeling less than because I don't have the hard skills, I didn't realize that I still had power in my soft skills. It's a lot to grow into and I only started really stepping into it about a year ago. It may be why my hair is purple now; probably because I'm more confident and I know I've already proven myself so I can do this.

What do you do to take care of yourself in your personal life to balance the stresses of work?

In the last year, DivComm (APA NY Metro Chapter's Diversity Committee) and Hindsight have been my ways to destress. I also have found my village, not just my personal village, but my village at work. I find allies in other ways, talk to them, and go visit them. Sometimes I won't send an email, instead I'll get up and go walk to talk to the person.

My mom is a retired nurse now and she told me that I have to leave work at work. For her it was critical since she saw many traumatizing things as an operating room nurse towards the end of her career. There were a few things that happened last year at work that pissed

me off so much that I took that anger home with me all weekend. I'd be washing dishes and talking to myself, being angry about it. At some point I realized 'Wow, this is crazy. The person that did this to me is not thinking about this on Saturday at 3 p.m., they stopped thinking about it on Friday at 4:59 p.m. So now I've taken all of the energy out of my entire weekend to focus on this thing that made me angry and the person that made me angry isn't even thinking about it. Who is losing?' And I had to talk out loud to myself and say that.

Recognizing what's really an emergency and what's not is also big. If you give me something at 3:59 p.m. on a Friday and you need it for Monday at 11:00 a.m. I'm sorry but that's not an emergency. I guarantee that if I sent it at 6:30 p.m. on Friday you won't read it until Monday at 10:00 a.m. anyway. Those are the small things. I'll come in early instead of staying late. Professionally, I try to take care of myself in the smaller ways by setting boundaries.

JUSTIN GARRETT MOORE

This is an abridged version of our conversation with Justin Garrett Moore. Visit www.prefacesguide.com to read the full version.

Justin Garrett Moore is an urban designer and Executive Director of the NYC Public Design Commission. He has extensive experience in urban design and city planning—from large-scale urban systems, policies, and projects to grassroots and community-focused planning, design, and arts initiatives. At the Public Design Commission his work is focused on prioritizing the quality and excellence of the public realm, and fostering accessibility, diversity, and inclusion in the City's public buildings, spaces, and art. He is a member of the American Planning Association, the Urban Design Forum, Next City's Vanguard, and serves on the faculty at Columbia University's GSAPP.

Why did you decide to pursue a career in design and planning?

My career path to design and ultimately planning started when I was very young. I grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana, in a predominantly black and working/middle-class neighborhood. Even as a kid I noticed that things were different in my neighborhood than when we would visit white neighborhoods, frankly. Our parks weren't as good, the conditions of things weren't as good. I was interested in how places were made and I was very lucky that my high school had a program where companies that had contracts with the school system would hire interns. While in high school, we were getting a new gymnasium addition and the architecture firm that had the contract to design it hired me, so at the age of 14 I was working 40 hours a week for my summer job in an architecture firm (CSO Architects). This is very rare for a little black boy from the inner-city, very, very rare. It was pure luck. There are very few people of color in the field at all. If I hadn't been exposed at an early age, I would probably be doing something else. It was the beginning of the end. I was exposed to so much, everything from the technical side of how you design projects, to construction, and project management. It was all very interesting to me. I always tell people that we would even go to community board

meetings to help present the projects, so at a very young age I was exposed to the field and many different aspects of it.

My career went in the direction of architecture, particularly building design, but the more and more I worked on it, I realized that my interest was broader. It was really the social and economic aspect of things that I was interested in. That's how I was able to transform from a building design focus to urban design, planning, and even policy. Over the years I also developed an interest in problem-solving. It's curious that in development projects there are so many major challenges that can range from the environmental to transportation infrastructure, and to me it's very engaging and valuable work to try and help open address these issues, regardless of where the community is located.

On CSO Architects: They still very actively work to bring more people of color into the field. They have a program now that's specifically for young black women, which is really great because there are so few in architecture.

Your experience spans from work with large-scale urban systems to more community-based planning. What inspires your involvement with grassroots organizations and how do you balance your priorities?

A lot of people think about their careers as only their day job, and I've just never done that. My career has always been comprised of a lot of different endeavors. Some of them are related to my job, some are side projects, and others are self-generated and self-directed. This has taken pressure off of one thing being everything.

I love that the work that I have in government is large-scale with a big impact and requires complicated problem-solving, but it's very disconnected from the grassroots, from direct action and working directly with people in a way that I think is really important. That's why I've done other work that suits my own interests. Being able to have that kind of connection, and contribution, allows you to learn from doing things in a very different way than is possible working in a government agency. I've intentionally done both.

In terms of balance, it takes a lot of time to manage these things and, believe it or not, there is a spreadsheet. There's a spreadsheet where I try to keep track of all the different things that I'm doing and how

they're either aligned or not, so that I can try—the degree possible—make one-and-one equal three in terms of my time and energy on certain things. I try to overlap or align the work that I may be doing in one role, which may be my work in government or organizations that I'm involved with directly, to my independent work so that they can connect as one project in my head. That makes it easier to balance and to do both.

The other piece is that for me and my career, I would not be able to do my work or to have the exposure and knowledge that I have for my career in government without having done the work that I've done independently, working with people, and vice-versa. They're very much connected and I think it gives you a larger worldview to understand and be more effective in your work.

I think that the field of urban design and it's practictionersare naturally multifaceted, multi-talented like Swiss Army knives, and I know that not every field is like that, but we just want to do a lot of different things. Even early on in my career I did other things besides my job that were pretty significant time and mental energy commitments. You have to train yourself on time management, bandwidth, and general energy management that are needed to do a lot of different things. For me, or maybe my personality type, doing multiple things has made my career easier because it's just more interesting, and if it's interesting it feels less like work; less tedious. That's been something that I've done even from early on in my career and it became my habit or pattern.

As the founder of Urban Patch and a board member of In Our Back Yards (ioby), what are some aspects of community design and planning that you think aren't taught or discussed enough in the field of planning?

There is a miseducation, I think, of people in planning and design. The kind of work and projects that I've been doing in Urban Patch and promoting at a broader scale with ioby acknowledge that there are skill-sets and ways of doing things that are not a part of our discipline. These are very basic things like how to talk to people, work with people, and/or create ideas for projects or initiatives. It's wonderful how that kind of work happens more in grassroots and, what a lot of people call the community-led or citizen-led or coalition-led projects. This is so important because it is a clearer historical reflection of how the world has been built and operated by people getting together, making

decisions, and making things happen. So much of education received within the university and in the practice is about power dynamics at the scale of implementation, consensus, governance, and policy—all these models that are obviously important and should be taught, but not to the complete erasure of all the other ways that the world gets built, managed, and operated. In my own teaching work I'm actively trying to introduce more of the grassroots and coalition approach to thinking about projects and change (i.e. rhizomatic learning).

I think another piece about what we've done with Urban Patch that is also embedded within the logic of ioby is the idea that small things add up to big things. There's two reasons why this is important. One is that communities that have over time been systematically excluded from power or financial access don't always have the resources to do medium or large things. Quite often that's the reality…it's the unfortunate bootstrap approach where they have to do a lot with a little. People in planning, design, development, and policy learning how they can help facilitate people that are at that level of resource is really important. ioby is a platform for people to do that, it's a platform for people that have limited resources to be able to make changes that demonstrate that you can have and exercise power. The second piece is the idea of building capacity. If you do one thing and have success at the level of an individual, a handful of people, or a collective, the small or fast win—people want to win…gives them capacity to do something either again or do something larger. That can aggregate over time. It would be better if this idea were more common in our field.

What's something that you know now, but wish you would have known earlier?

I would say that one little thing is to make time to read. You do it by force when you're in school, but I think a lot of people don't have the access to a certain type of exposure that's necessary to advance and the only hack that I know is reading.

Another easy one that I wish I would've done earlier in my career is to self-promote. Maybe with the younger generation it's easier because of social media, but make it a point that people know who you are. It's hard for a lot of people, but it's something that the more you can do when you're younger, it becomes natural and something that you can do consistently. A lot of people that I think are very good and better than me, very strong, yet haven't been able to advance, it's frankly because

nobody knows that they exist. Doing that work…putting yourself out there and to feel comfortable and confident doing that, especially for people of color, can be intimidating a lot of times. That's what starts you earlier on a track of going and being in a room and being someone that speaks. The earlier that can happen in your career the better it is. You almost get comfortable with that role and visibility, and it helps. I'm kind of an introverted person, but I do conferences, I speak in front of large groups, and have a certain level of exposure that's not my natural way of wanting to be in the world, but it's necessary to do for the work that I care about and need to advance. That's also another one of those miseducation points. You're not really taught how to do that in any of the traditional training that people get. It's almost like in professional practice classes they should have a self-promotion assignment or something. The reading is to broaden and keep your exposure up, and then you have to actively work to make yourself visible.

Especially for people of color, we'll talk a lot about the pipeline and that the professions don't reflect things for the younger generation. You make it in, you're here, you're just doing this and not being seen. Then, even though yes you are in the profession, if you're not seen by anybody you're not helping the issue. Even if you're an introverted type, you have to let that go a little bit and do the work to be seen because it does add up. Applying for the fellowships and all those kinds of things are important, not just for your own career path but really for the whole field.

Mentorship is also big. One of my mentors passed a few years ago, but she made all the difference. We had very different personalities, but she basically made it so that I never saw the career as one thing. She was always supportive of me doing many things. I had a good mentor and I've been mostly lucky that I've had good bosses. It changes a lot. When people are going to get their first jobs, they're focused on the job, but they should also focus on who their boss is, what that person has done, and what kind of environment they create. It's hard to tell in an interview, but you can research and ask around. I had good bosses and every time I had an opportunity, they didn't shut me down. If one or two of those opportunities had came up and they said 'You can't take time off to do X,' then that closes doors to all kinds of things.

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