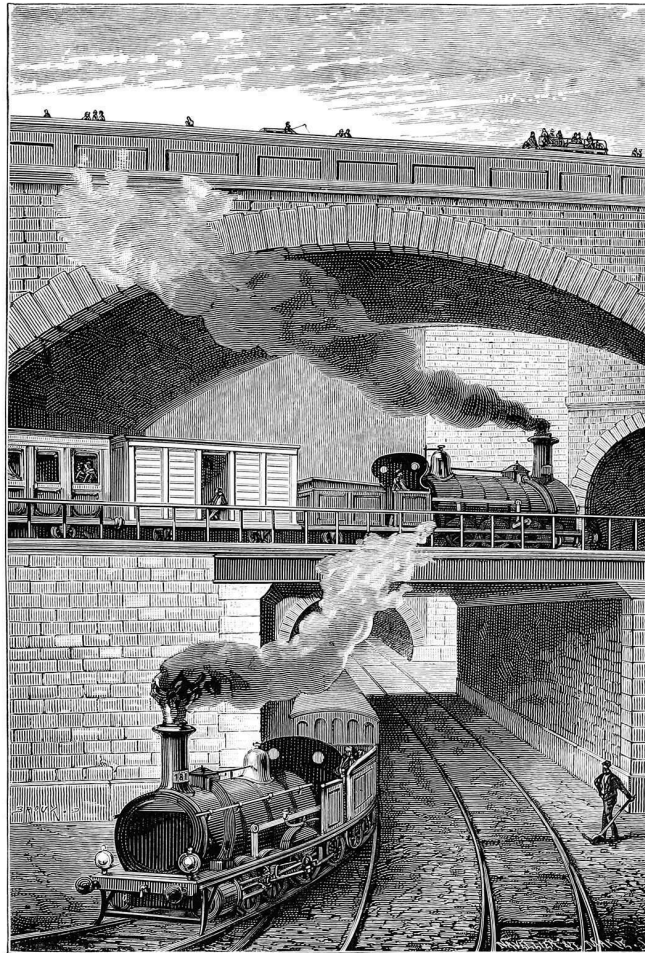


MASS Educational Program

Theories, Concepts, and Key Vocabulary



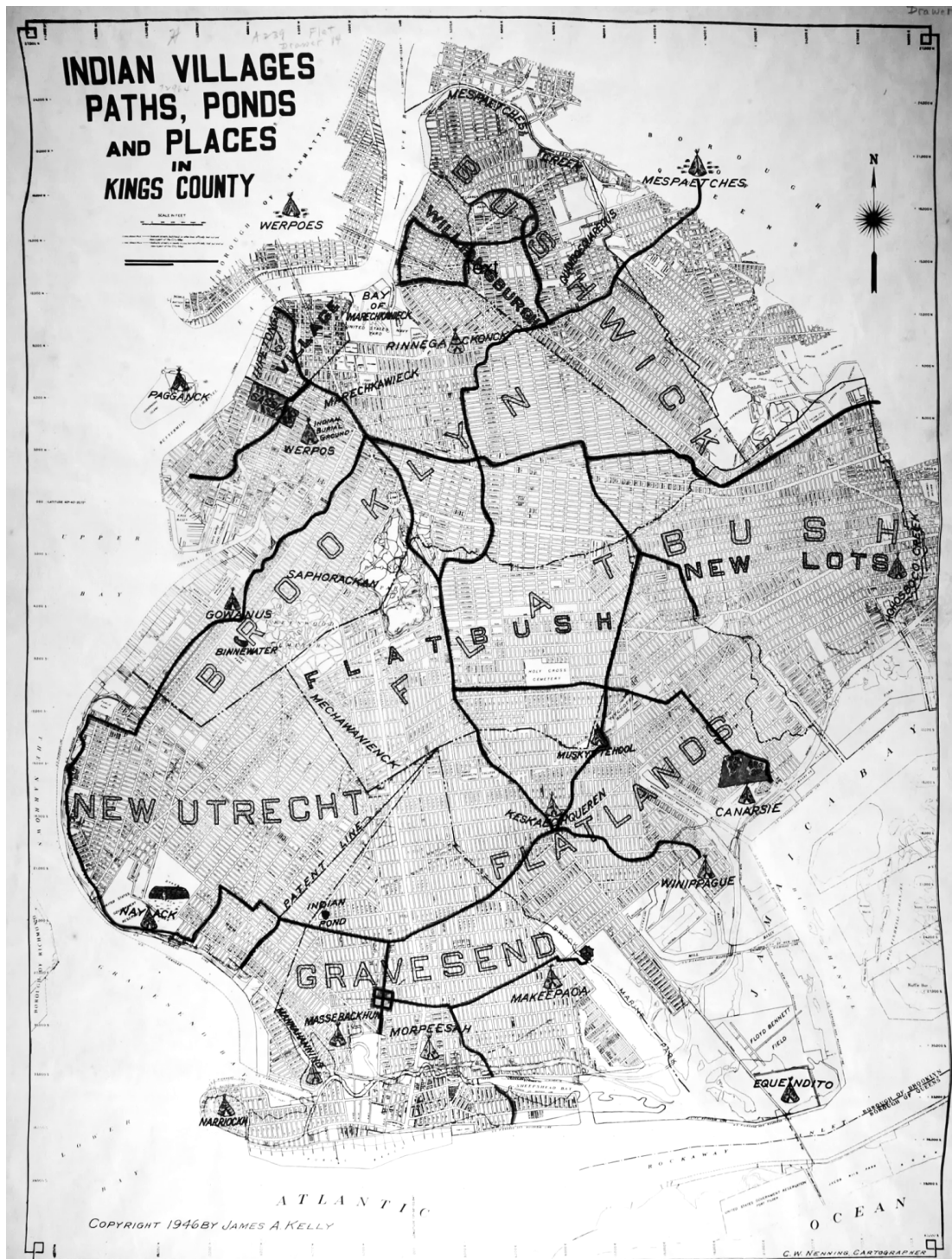
Week 7: Capitalist Urban Planning & Systems of Oppression

03/08/25

At MASS we recognize the harm, exploitation, and atrocities done upon native people by our imperial government, and call for the immediate redressing of native land dispossession, and the continued and robust defending and protecting the sovereignty of Indigenous nations.

We currently reside on the land of the Lenape people - **Lenapehoking**

They lived off the land, co-existed with all forms of nature, and were true examples of what it means to be conscious and thoughtful caretakers of land. They understood that we belong to the land, the land does not belong to the people. We aim to carry these values and honor the history and strength of the Lenape.



What is Urban Planning? - Kyron

- The development (planning) and designing of how to use the land in cities
 - Ideally incorporating green spaces, fresh air, sustainable design
 - ensuring the protection of land, local farms, and community gardens.
 - Done with consideration of factors like infrastructure, social systems and environmental impacts
- Methods of Transport – benches for bus stops, bike lanes, upgrading the subway system, or in Robert Moses' case, just put roads everywhere :/

Urban Renewal Program ~ 1920s

- **Robert Moses** was the face of the program, essentially a fascist, an unelected official that took over numerous gov't positions at once
- stole funds from public transportation to build highways & parks of his own vision (cookie cutter playgrounds, equipment)
- demolished and forcibly evicted over a quarter million residents across the city using **eminent domain**
- replacing integrated neighborhoods with less dense, underfunded public housing (NYCHA)
 - Example: tearing down neighborhoods in the Bronx for the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway
 - Example: Prospect Park Expressway caused mass displacement of people in the Kensington/ Flatbush area, clearing for small stubs of road
- He ignored material conditions, facts, figures (**induced demand**)
 - In terms of efficiency, highways are terrible. Four lane road you get about 8,000 people moving in both directions per hour. A simple two line subway can move almost 60,000 people (given frequencies)
 - He thought the automobile was the future and everyone would be traveling in isolated luxury

Redlining: Systematic means to deny ownership to people (usually minorities) – a completely subjective process (and racist).

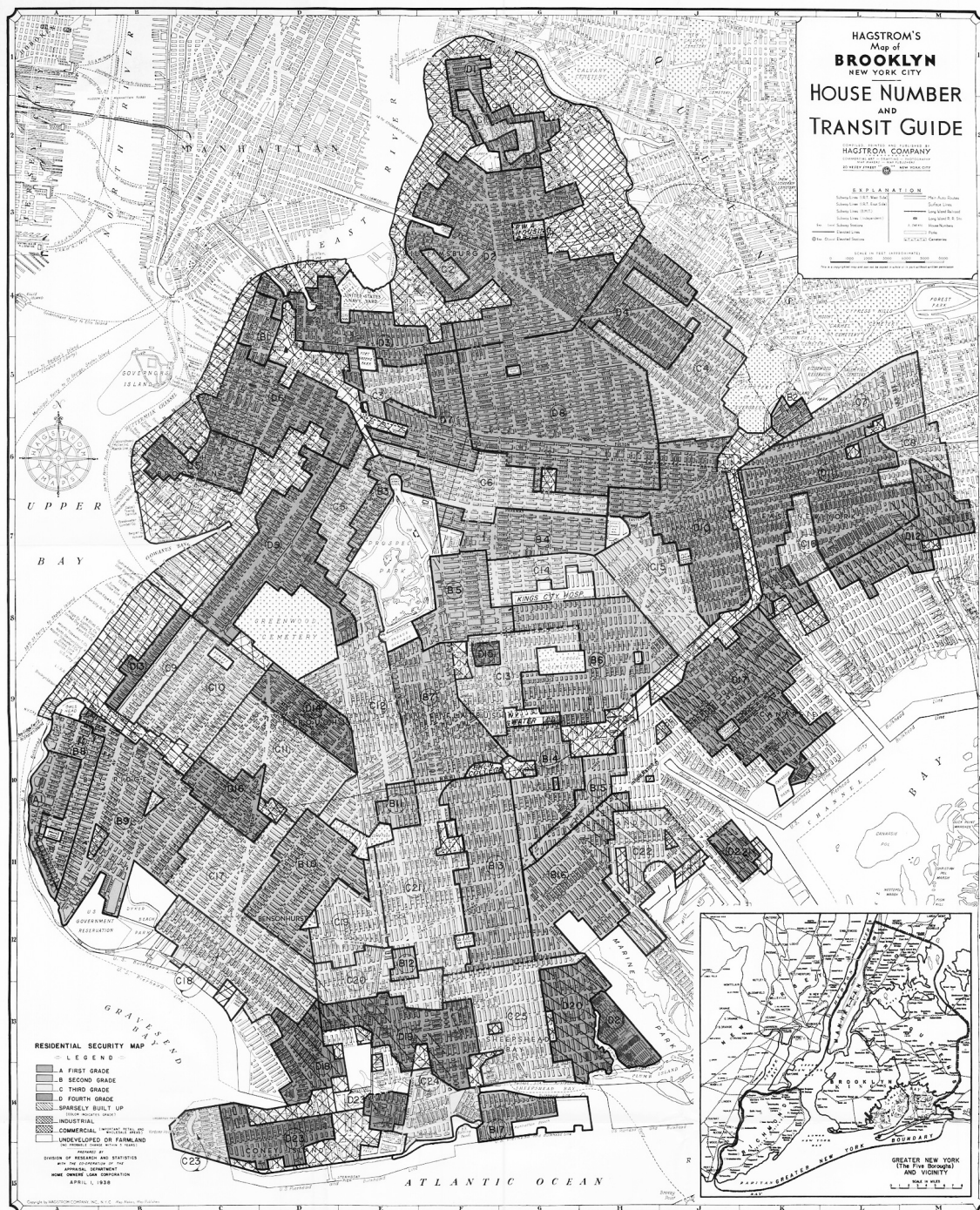
- A policy segregating neighborhoods, drawing imaginary lines to dictate who can live where, a precursor allowing the demographic shift of neighborhoods to become such segregated places
- grading each neighborhood's investment-worthiness based on race
 - Any “undesirable racial elements” would tank a neighborhood's rating
- Creation of leases and deeds that promised the government that the area would remain “for members of the caucasian race only”

Eminent Domain: a way for the government to take away land from people.

- They send an eviction notice telling owners “you have to move”
- Technically supposed to give fair compensation to those they are displacing, but under Robert Moses his goal was just get people out
- It was a tool abused by the government (and now corporations) to say, “I need this land, I'm going to build on it for the sake of economic development I promise”
- Can be a legitimate use of land for public use, for example construction of public transit, assuming you've done your proper cost benefit analysis:
 - making sure that people in the community benefit from this taking over of specific parcels of land

Induced Demand: ‘If you build it, they will come’

- The idea that supply will dictate demand - you are the traffic
 - “The highways are popular, I'm just gonna build a ton more and people will come, instead of actually alleviating the congestion of traffic”



Example of Red-Lining in brooklyn, areas were rated A-D

Critique of Everyday Life by Henri Lefebvre

1. A marxist that studied philosophy, applied theory to material conditions of everyday life
2. **Lefebvre** argues that our day-to-day lives has become a “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption,” critique of consumer society, market capitalism
3. “Right to the city,” object of political struggle
 - a. right to social participation, public life, habitat, freedom (revolution)
 - b. In capitalism, cities have been downgraded to the status of a commodity. To reclaim it as a place for the people, is essentially a call to revolution
4. Industrial Revolution, rise of capitalism: segregation of spaces within an urban setting solely by function

Housing

1. Themes found in recent urban planning:
 - a. Hyper-individualism, ‘bootstraps’ mentality
 - i. Usually car-centric, places are far apart and parking lots are everywhere
 - ii. pride comes from being able to drive your car where ever you want and you own it
 - b. Nuclear Family and insular family living
 - i. Family is all you got, marry & move out & start again
 - ii. Opposite of communal living, intergenerational, material-based infrastructure and solidarity
 - c. Exclusionary Zoning, HOLC (homeowner’s loan corporation)

Exchange Value: The dollar/monetary amount that you could sell something for in a market

Use Value: The actual use that the item has, it’s usefulness as an object in real life

Private Property: goods or services that the core function of is to generate profit or wealth for the owner

Personal Property: Your toothbrush or your bed that you sleep in, the core function is its use value.

Sanctuary Asset: property bought or acquired to be used as your own sanctuary, your own means of survival

Investment Asset: property bought or acquired and used solely for building capital and hoarding everything.

The Myth of a Housing Shortage - Investors and companies will accumulate huge amounts housing units and price them very high, creating a false scarcity that leaves many of the apartments empty

The Neoliberal Housing Model

Bureaucratic Structures and Reform

1. In New York City, zoning has been in place since the 1961 Zoning Resolution, which institutionalized segregation by controlling not only the types of buildings allowed but also their market value.
2. Unlike cities with no zoning, like Houston, which still face developer-driven inequality, NYC's zoning laws are manipulated to serve capital.
3. One major zoning reform effort, City of Yes, was intended to address housing shortages. Bureaucratic structures keep them at the mercy of politicians who prioritize their donors over evidence-based solutions.
 - a. well-intentioned nerds in specialized gov't agencies like DCP (Department of City Planning), DOT (Department Of Transportation) are powerless to politicians, often being forced to create policy in favor of the bourgeois
 - i. personal experience as intern at DCP
 - b. institutional distrust of people, generational trauma of displacement
 - c. drawn out planning processes that lets the rich interfere, delay, and cancel projects that have involved community
 - i. 70s era legislation like requiring EISs (Environmental Impact Statement)
 - d. community hearings, requires individuals to take time out of day to give their opinion to make a change

4. A concrete example is parking minimums – research showed they limit housing supply, yet Mayor Adams dismissed reform efforts to appease car-owning elites rather than prioritizing affordability.
5. Community Board members tend to be the elite that misrepresent the community's true opinions
 - a. Perpetual chaos between agencies and politicians
 - b. DESPITE all this: failure to address systemic issues
 - i. Homelessness
 - ii. food insecurity

Tax Breaks

1. Instead of addressing the housing crisis through public initiatives, NYC relies on tax breaks and incentives for private developers. This neoliberal system includes
 - a. PPPs – Public-Private Partnerships
 - b. POPS – Privately Owned Public Space
 - i. midtown plazas marketed as public spaces but ultimately benefiting developers.
 - c. Zfa – Zoning for Accessibility
 - i. developers set aside space for transit accessibility, such as elevators, in exchange for building bonuses.
2. Even with perceived benefits, these strategies reinforce dependence on private capital, and the idea that land is something that can be owned.
3. We should be guaranteed rights to public spaces and universal accessibility

Appeasing Communities through False Promises

- developers promising a certain number of affordable housing units, then walking back on the deal and trying to make money off of it.
 - Hudson Yards (halved housing units, reduced green space, built a casino, perpetuates poverty and exploitation)

Marx/Engels Types Of “Rent”

The different ways landlords extract surplus value from land

(*Socialist Voice*, “Marxism and the housing crisis”, David Hartery)

Differential rent: More popular, higher profit

- landowner charges portion of land as extra cost for use of land via surplus value created
- Occurs when there is a difference in quality of land that makes it more profitable
 - Capital investment in good well drained land provides a better return than the same investment in worse land.
 - This surplus additional value is created as the differential and the landowner charges a portion of it as an extra cost for the use of the land
 - essentially you're charging for the use of a particular piece of land because its “better”
 - Example: land in times square or soho is super expensive, not because the buildings are better but because the landlords know the foot traffic is high, so they inflate the rent to match perceived value

Monopoly rent: Paying extra for rare or special land, exclusivity

- supply and demand economics, unique characteristics of land that makes it especially desirable, transforms land into an asset though fictitious capital/ scarcity
 - Example: Africa's vast stores of rare earth minerals allow for monopolization of resources by bad actors, as there are only so many mines with that mineral
 - Example: investment beachfront properties taking up all the waterfront space, putting an (ever-inflating) price on the beach, since they control all the beaches
 - Forcing your hand

Absolute rent: paying rent just because landowners exist

- price of land at margin, landowner requires rent for unused land due to exclusive rights and their ability to charge

Non-capitalist solutions

- Land Back
 - restoring Indigenous sovereignty and stewardship of land
- Tenant Unions
 - collective bargaining for collective rights
 - protecting community members, advocating for your neighbors against landlords
- Community Land Trusts
 - a local organization that is involved in the collective purchasing of certain pieces of land or housing units to be redistributed to community members that are especially of lower income
 - the goal is to eventually transition those tenants to being owners of that new housing unit, apartment, etc
 - Local organization East New York Community Land Trust
 - Fighting new development and displacement near Broadway Junction meant to gentrify the area by buying up certain units and redistributing them
 - ENYCLT: www.eastnewyorkclt.org
 - Essentially a ‘bank account’ of land that can be fairly distributed to people, maintain it, all while prioritizing that people don’t get displaced by developers, luxury units, etc.

Experiments

- Soviet public housing
 - cost-effective large-scale templates to house the masses
- Chinese housing model
 - focus on rent controlled units over home ownership
- Freetown Christiania -
99percentinvisible.org/episode/598-christiania/
 - anarchist commune in Copenhagen
 - Danish military base reclaimed by the people
 - **self-governed**, rent-free living, only maintenance fees,
 - no private ownership of land/housing, no weapons & violence, no vehicles

- downside was the interference via the drug market (Pusher St) imports, raids by the police state, gang turf wars
 - eventually leaders had to ask for assistance from the state to push out gangs (could be an allegory to the dictatorship of the proletariat rather than a leaderless commune)
- construct institutional affordable housing to appease the state, and impose rules onto the commune by the state (not sure what to think about it, interesting case study)

Urban Spaces

Broader Concepts

- **Third Places**

- A place that's not your home, not your job, but a third place
- Place of occupation where you can spend time without spending money, without special membership, hangout
 - Example: open plazas for the people, a place for conversation, socialization, demonstration
- Zoning practices of the last century are creating a separation of land use, which is causing a decline of third spaces
 - Capitalism priorities office spaces and private property over shared space and community

- **Gentrification**

- a process in which a poor area (as of a city) experiences an influx of middle-class or wealthy people who renovate and rebuild homes and businesses and which often results in an increase in property values and the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents (Merriam-Webster)
- While the focus is usually (rightly so) focused on the negative effects of gentrification on locals experiencing displacement, there is much to be said about the actual function of renovating and rebuilding that can be done without this process of displacement and property theft
 - Positive development like bike lanes, public amenities, don't have to be mutually exclusive to pricing out current residents

- **15 minute city**
 - The concept of being able to access most goods and services within your neighborhood - everything important is a 15 minute walk away.
 - Right-wing conspiracies use this concept as a boundary, locking people into these little 15 minute zones and restricting freedom of movement
 - The goal is to ensure easy access to goods and services without reliance on a car.
 - Comrade brings up the idea of a 15-60 minute city, where the original 15 minute “radius” includes necessities, while other institutions like hospitals or your job are a 60 minute commute on transit (whether on car/bike/train/bus!)
 - A good working model that we could go off of to provide resources to our community members
 - debunk the idea of it limiting you to a certain place, rather giving you more means of freedom, access

The Term “Car Accident”

We shouldn't be referring to them as *car accidents* because through the gas and auto lobby industry we have this huge reliance on the car and private vehicles in the U.S. There are **no** accidents in fatalities or injuries, as they refuse to build safer roads or provide funding for safer means of transportation, trains, buses, high speed rail across the nation. We're trying to be mindful of the vocabulary or the terminology we use, because by saying *car accidents*, you're shifting the blame from the vehicle/ the institution, to the individual, the pedestrian. The term is **car crash**. We are about intentional language and recognizing that the fault is on the system and are mindful not to shift the blame to individuals.



Road Design

- **NACTO** - National Association of City Transportation Officials
- The Netherlands, which I fully acknowledge have their colonial routes, have good ideas in terms of urban planning with certain networks for a specific mode of movement.
 - Certain streets exist only for people to sort of stroll around, others dedicated to bike traffic, and then others to cars.
- taking back from car dependence, bring back the road to the people, sustainable means of transport
 - Organizing community outreach to design our own human-scale block
- **34th Ave Open Streets in Jackson Heights**
 - A multi-mile long section of road where it has been completely closed off to automobile traffic other than your residents parking by the curb.
 - Huge community program where there are events that happen year round, there are barriers to cars, and people are free to walk and bike down the street.
 - not a DOT initiative, rather co-opted into wider program of Open Streets developed and actively maintained by local community members despite loud opposition

Unsafe Roads or Unsafe Driving?

- The idea of creating roads that encourage safe driving behavior as opposed to just like punishing unsafe driving.
- Making it safer through design and not just random enforcements of the law
 - Speed limit.
 - Wide roads in the suburbs where they slap a speed limit sign of 25, no one's going to obey because you have the perception of a wide road you don't see any hazards, so you just speed right down.
 - In reality, the road should be designed narrower to mold behavior to more safe practices (slower)
 - Visual obstacles like trees
 - You want to design it so that it's relatively inconvenient to drive so that you're more focused on the hazards and you're actively slowing down to make sure that you're avoiding them rather than just sticking a sign and saying: **“Hey, obey this”**
 - Daylighting
 - clearing the corner of an intersection visually so that it's easier for pedestrians to see out onto the street and not get hit by a car.
 - This also narrows the width of the street, forcing cars to go slower and make smaller turns
 - Extending the sidewalk or curb reduces the pedestrian crossing time and also provides less of a risk of injury.

“Reconstructing roadways to discourage speeding and other traffic infractions, as well as fostering alternative entities to manage traffic safety can contribute to road safety. While circumstances preventing the hazards associated with police led traffic control reengineering city roads can involve constructing speed bumps, tapering streets, involving traffic circles, and planning traffic paths to curtail unsafe driving behaviors.”

- Beyond Policing.

Miscellaneous sources

https://kkholodilin.github.io/Test_HE/ch-Urban.html#sec:Gradient

<https://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/theory/marxism/terms/termsmainframe.html>



Our distro spot in the 40s! (this was the dunkin)

Reading List

- Critique of Everyday Life by Henri Lefebvre
- Dialectical Urbanism: Social Struggles in the Capitalist City by Andy Merrifield
- Beyond Plague Urbanism by Andy Merrifield