The Urban Review team is thrilled to present our Fall 2013 issue! Every semester students of the Hunter Urban Affairs and Planning department, graduate and undergraduate, work together to bring you this collection of writing on cities and urban issues.

This semester’s issue travels the world (locations highlighted in the map below), documenting different perspectives on social inequality and the systems that enable it. The furthest afield are two research articles, by Sheldon Baker and Dan Altman, which summarise issues of housing and displacement in South Asian societies that are struggling with widespread poverty even as they see increases in development and economic wealth.

The subject of international migration brings us an interview with Vivian Louie, a visiting professor at Hunter this year, who tells us about her research into how different immigrant groups negotiate life in the US, and an article by Nnenna Agba, who describes how her experiences growing up in two countries have made her an advocate for social justice.

Back in the United States, Griff Braun presents a compelling case that rising economic inequality in this country is at least partially a result of the sprawling shape of our metropolitan regions, while Linda McIntyre, in her account of the rise and spread of the ‘anti-Agenda 21’ movement, gives a description of some of the obstacles facing any advocates of progressive urban planning.

Turning to the city we call home, Natsumi Yokura’s photographs and a dispatch from GUAP’s PARK(ing) Day festivities help us consider how space is used in the city, and by whom. And finally, we are excited to include an interview with Hunter UAP alumnus James Rausse, AICP, who takes us through the work he is engaged in throughout the city.

The field of urban policy is a wide-ranging and complex one, full of conflicting ideas and competing visions. We at the Urban Review believe that the best ideas are only formulated as a consequence of and only communicated in the midst of a robust conversation among practitioners, theorists, and students of our subject—a rich stew of intellectual and policy experimentation of which we try to make the Urban Review a small but spicy part.

But conversation cannot be a one-sided affair! To facilitate a more active dialogue between this magazine and the community which is its audience, we will be accepting letters to the editor responding to any of the content in this semester’s issue from anyone—be they student, teacher, or alum. Send us your thoughts at hunterurbanreview@gmail.com. We will also be starting a blog in the coming months!

Sam Chodoff, Editor-in-Chief
What has it been like to be the president of the Metro chapter of the APA for a year now?

Great, but different than I anticipated. Last October I had a specific vision for what the next two and a half years would be, primarily focusing on expanding educational opportunities, making planning and certification more of an important issue in New York City and in New York State, really expanding the capabilities and capacities of planners with finance and communication, those types of skills. But then Sandy hit.

The APA has been working very hard on Sandy response and recovery, and you have been working closely with the city. In your estimation, what is the city doing well and what is the city not doing well?

The city is doing well is the quality of the experts they have brought in. Where I feel they could have definitely done better is with communication.

What can we do to improve the resiliency of our low-lying areas?

You have to think regionally. What are the similarities between different areas? We did a lot of work in the Rockaways. Thirteen disparate communities on one peninsula that barely talk to each other, including Breezy Point, a private land cooperative, who would prefer people not know about them. Communication is a key here. We’ve got to connect the dots on what other areas are doing. You need to think beyond your boundaries.

How has Sandy changed the way people think about and talk about planning in New York?

We’re talking about things we’ve never talked about before. For a city with one of the greatest water systems in the world, we had little relationship with the water. It has greatly improved over the last decade or so, but Sandy really opened the discussion. City planning just came out with the flood resilience text amendments—I know the gentlemen who worked on it, Chris Holme and Tom Wargo—it’s really good stuff that New York City never would have considered beforehand. The attitudes have changed. And while maybe not everything is going to be about resiliency, people are going to think twice about the impact of development on our infrastructure.

How permanent do you think these changes are?

I think it’s instilled enough so that people in the next 20 years are going to remember. As I mentioned, it has already changed our zoning resolution; we’ve already adapted waterfront strategies that city planning released; buildings are going to have stricter restrictions on where to build; creativity with lower density growth management areas. That’s already underway.

We are also moving more towards sustainability and green infrastructure. Urban farms aren’t such a crazy notion anymore. These are conversations people are having. So I think that while we may not be as advanced as Rotterdam or other European cities when it comes to sustainability, it’s a shift in culture. We’ve already improved in certain health indicators. I think it’s true; we still just need it to graduate into being a no-brainer.

You mentioned that pre-Sandy there was a focus on education projects and policy. We tend to isolate broad pillars of planning: housing, community development, education, etc. Now, post-Sandy, is education still on the map and if so, what would be the pillar the APA has shifted towards?

I like to say we’re an education and advocacy organization. We have our Young Planners Group, which focuses on building young professionals who have recently graduated from an undergrad or master’s program in urban planning or urban studies. Within that is our Youth in Planning Program, which has been a model for chapters across the country. The program goes into high schools, and junior high schools to expose the idea of planning to students as young as twelve years old. It’s so kids can get involved in their neighborhood and understand how their neighborhood came to be.

The Bronx has obviously come a long way since the 1970s financial crisis; however, the 2010 census determined the 16th congressional district in the South Bronx to be the poorest district in the nation. In light of all the incredible community development and economic growth over the past several decades, how can this still be the case?

The cost of living here has far outpaced wages throughout the city, which is why Ruben Diaz Jr. was pushing the city council to pass a living wage bill—to assure that people can at least, when they have a job, meet the minimum threshold of poverty so they can be able to feed their family. That particular congressional district houses the largest concentration of public housing in the country. Just in Mott Haven alone you have the Patterson Houses, Mott Haven Houses, Batemans Houses, Millbrook Houses, Mitchell Houses. Those are five extremely large housing developments just around 138th street. That congressional district captures a lot of housing and those are our residents who are most in need.

There has been a lot of talk about the trends of the South Bronx and the potential for gentrification. Where do you think these concerns are coming from?

Some people think that the Bronx will become gentrified if you start building in that area. We look at it as a balancing act. The Bronx has been the destination for a long time for the city’s low-income population. We did a study in 2006 analyzing the New York City housing and Development Corporation’s Low-Income Affordable Marketplace Program [LAMP], which focuses on building housing for populations 60% of AMI and below. Sixty-five percent of projects utilizing the LAMP Program went to the Bronx. Fifty-six percent in community boards. I through 6. And so, we don’t want gentrification, but we do want opportunities for our young people, we want eyes on the street, we want activity. There has been an increase of middle class Latino and black population in the area but it’s not such a critical mass that the Bronx has been gentrified.

Ten of thousands of affordable housing units will be eligible to exit affordability in the next mayor’s term. The majority of these units are in Brooklyn and the Bronx. What are some of the challenges this poses for planners in the outer boroughs?

Predatory equity is an ongoing problem. After the housing crash, it replaced predatory lending as the primary housing issue. Speculators would buy clusters of buildings with the intent to do Major Capital Improvements, then either flip them or immediately raise the rent to the legal maximum. The worst of them, the Ocelot and Milbank portfolios, resulted in serious intervention by the Borough President with other elected officials to work with HPD to reline the buildings and have a say in who the owners would be taking over these buildings, assuring the residents were owners in good standing and that they wouldn’t try to flip the building. But it is my opinion that the focus needs to shift towards rehab. In the Bronx at least, rehab have not been the main focus, it’s been new construction.

Do you anticipate any changes for urban planners in New York City under the new administrations?

For the planning profession it will be a new paradigm. We’re not a planning city; we’re a development city, but it has been a good time for planning. Whether personally you agree with Amanda Burden’s policies or not, planning has had a major role in the shaping of the city for the last twelve years. What’s interesting about de Blasio is that his campaign has focused on income inequality. That means a shift in how we build affordable housing. Mayor Bloomberg has noted that we are 95% of the way to our goal of building or preserving 165,000 units of affordable house. But who has really benefited? That’s what we’re going to have to look at. We’re going to have to target lower income families. We’re going to have to target existing housing stock for buildings. We’re going to have to look at programs that are sunsetting, like the Mitchell-Lama Program. It’s going to be interesting to create different strategies for community space opportunities and integrate them into zoning and what we build. We’ve done it with inclusionary zoning. We’ve done it with green building and active design guidelines. It will be interesting to see if de Blasio takes a step further.

How has a degree in urban planning helped you?

It has helped me beyond what I could ask from it. It’s one big ironic point in my life that I’ve never worked in a pure planning job, but planning touches all aspects of what I do. Here, we work on planning policy. When Ruben Diaz Jr. became borough president, I was speaking to our chief of staff here about being Director of Capital Programs and I said, “You know, I don’t have any type of serious math or financial background but I’ve learned it on the job.” And he said, “Well for the kind of budgeting that we do I think having an urban planning degree is perfect because you understand the context of how we’re spending our money.” It’s a matter of: here’s our investment. What’s going to be the end product? What’s right/wrong with the proposed project? How does it affect the site? How does it affect the neighborhood? And how does it affect policy for the Bronx?

If you could go back in time to when you were first entering the program and give yourself advice, what would it be?

To allow myself to be more open to topics I wasn’t used to. Having graduated from Purchase College with a dual degree in Philosophy and Literature, Ian Gray is now continuing his education at Hunter’s Master of Urban Planning Program while working and living in the Bronx.
THE PARANOID STYLE IN THE AMERICAN PLANNING PROCESS: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SUSTAINABILITY GETS POLITICAL

BY LINDA McINTYRE

[Adapted from an article originally published in the August 2012 issue of Landscape Architecture magazine]

A few years ago, while researching an article about a collaborative regional transportation and land use planning effort in Maine, I came across something that seemed unusual. Some opponents of the effort, known as Gateway 1, had expressed concern that it was part of "Agenda 21," a global anti-property conspiracy led by the United Nations. It seemed like a bizarre, slightly amusing sideshow built on an assumption that planners and other land use professionals, as well as the UN, have far more power than they actually do.

But the outcome wasn't funny. After the article was published, one of the Gateway 1 volunteers I had interviewed got back in touch with me. He said that the state Department of Transportation under the newly elected governor had ordered the suspension of the project, which had started almost a decade earlier. In a letter to participants, David Bernhardt, the Commissioner of Transportation under Governor Paul Le Page, said that the project didn't "correspond with the immediate priorities of this administration."

No specific reasons were given for this unexpected move. The locally driven process had been started by the DOT, and the agency's grants to participating communities had been modest. But Le Page's strong support from so-called Tea Party Republicans meant the suspension of Gateway 1 got the attention of sustainability and smart growth advocates across the country.

Sustainability has become a mainstream objective for a lot of planners and design professionals, but not everyone thinks that's a good idea. Even after the recession clobbered a lot of planners and design professionals, but not everyone thinks that's a good idea. Even after the recession clobbered many cities and planners are working toward is something they want no part of.

The downside of suburbanization and auto dependency—its environmental impact, its reliance on subsidies that mostly benefit the middle class, even its impact on public health—is something we talk about a lot in planning circles. But for many people who have been living, or aspiring to, the suburban lifestyle prized throughout the second half of the 20th century, urbanism can look like a challenge to their way of life, and plans to promote it might even look un-American. Agenda 21, a 20-year-old, non-binding United Nations document, has become a lightning rod for people skeptical of sustainability programs and smart growth. What started out as rants on obscure, conspiracy-minded websites is now playing out in public meetings and state legislatures across the country.

Agenda 21 has also been raised at a lot of local planning commission meetings. Planners and urban designers might not be tuned into the discussion if they aren't deeply interested in politics. But they might want to seek out more information, because Agenda 21-driven opposition can derail projects and plans. And despite the enjoyable frisson of weirdness that the prospect of a global conspiracy to strong-arm communities into adopting environmental regulations and smart growth presents, it's worth considering some of their concerns. That's because, several people told me as I researched the issue over the last few years, sometimes the planning and design communities inadvertently set off or intensify those concerns.

THE REAL AGENDA 21

Agenda 21 (the "21" refers to the 21st century) is a broad-based, voluntary work plan for sustainable development that came out of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. At the Rio conference, more than 170 world leaders, including then-president George H. W. Bush, pledged to help developing countries grow in a sustainable manner, and to conserve natural resources for future generations.

The document itself is long and slightly eye-glazing. It was written in the formal and ponderous language of international relations. Chapter 10, which covers the proposed "Integrated Approach to the Planning and Management of Land Resources," is typical of what you'll find inside. It's repetitive and vague, yet targeted enough to provoke skepticism—if not outright bewilderment—among readers not accustomed to the complicated and stiff language of consensus-based diplomacy.

The chapter is larded with statements such as "Governments at the appropriate levels, with the support of national and international organizations, should promote the improvement, further development, and widespread application of planning and management tools that facilitate an integrated and sustainable approach to land and resources" and "Integration should take place at two levels, considering, on the one hand, all environmental, social, and economic factors (including, for example, impacts of the various economic and social sectors on the environmental and natural resources) and, on the other, all environmental and resource components together (i.e., air, water, biota, land, geological, and natural resources)." This all in a day's work for international bureaucrats and policy wonks. It sounds lofty and substantive.

But a close reading of this and other Agenda 21 chapters will reveal few specifics and no requirements that anyone actually do anything. That's why all of the countries at a big international conference can agree and sign off on this kind of statement. Even if the agreement did include commitments, the UN has no legal or political mechanisms to force any changes to any national, state, or local laws, let alone eliminate property rights as enshrined in the Constitution and dismantle the American Dream.

PLANNING JARGON INTENSIFIES FEARS...

Still, the sentiment behind Agenda 21 scares some people, and the way we talk about planning can intensify those fears. "My main takeaway from all of this is that the buzzwords we all learn in school are awful," says Andrew Whittemore, an assistant professor of city and regional planning at the University of Texas, Arlington. "They allow people to read things into situations that aren't there. When people aren't used to hearing phrases like 'streetscape improvement plan,' it can be a cue for conspiratorial thinking." Last year, Whittemore wrote on the Atlantic Cities website last year that planners should focus less on denying that Agenda 21 is a conspiracy and more on trying to make debates about land use and sustainability more productive.

Nathan Norris agrees. "I blame a lot of the current problems on the planning side," he says. "They're trying to do something good, but they don't take the time to explain what they're doing in a comprehensive way," says Norris, the former director of implementation and advisory activities at PlaceMakers in Montgomery, Alabama and currently the CEO of the Lafayette, Louisiana Downtown Development Authority. He told me he had to diplomatically remove a colleague from the room during a planning project in Mississippi when the colleague's eye rolling and other negative body language helped to accelerate a meeting's degeneration into politics. "It took us an hour to get back to talking about substance," he says.

...AND SO DO POLITICAL COMMENTATORS

Like most documents that come out of international conferences and summit meetings, Agenda 21 got little attention outside the insular international policy world.
The RESOLUTION EXPOSING UNITED NATIONS AGENDA 21

WHEREAS, the United Nations Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of extreme environmentalism, social engineering, and global political control that was initiated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992; and,

WHEREAS, the United Nations Agenda 21 is being covertly pushed into local communities throughout the United States of America through the International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) through local “sustainable development” policies such as Smart Growth, Wildlands Project, Resilient Cities, Regional Visioning Projects, and other “Green” or “Alternative” projects; and,

WHEREAS, this United Nations Agenda 21 plan of so-called “sustainable development” views the American way of life of private property ownership, single family homes, private car ownership and individual travel choices, and privately owned farms; all as destructive to the environment; and,

WHEREAS, according to the United Nations Agenda 21 policy, social justice is described as the right and opportunity of all people to benefit equally from the resources afforded us by society and the environment which would be accomplished by socialist/communist redistribution of wealth; and,

WHEREAS, according to the United Nations Agenda 21 policy, national sovereignty is deemed a social injustice; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, the Republican National Committee recognizes the destructive and insidious nature of United Nations Agenda 21 and hereby exposes to the public and public policy makers the dangerous intent of the plan; and therefore be it further

RESOLVED, that the U.S. government and no state or local government is legally bound by the United Nations Agenda 21 treaty in that it has never been endorsed by the (U.S.) Senate, and therefore be it further

RESOLVED, that the federal and state and local governments across the country be well informed of the underlying harmful implications of implementation of United Nations Agenda 21 destructive strategies for “sustainable development” and we hereby endorse rejection of its radical policies and rejection of any grant monies attached to it, and therefore be it further

RESOLVED, that upon the approval of this resolution the Republican National Committee shall deliver a copy of this resolution to each of the Republican members of Congress, all Republican candidates for Congress, all Republican candidates for President who qualify for RNC sanctioned debates, and to each Republican state and territorial party office and recommend for adoption into the Republican Party Platform at the 2012 Convention.

As Approved by the Republican National Committee, January 13, 2012
legislation was approved earlier this year in Missouri, but Governor Jay Nixon, a Democrat, vetoed it in July. “It is fundamentally misguided and unnecessary to require local government officials to become international law experts in order to perform their duties,” Nixon said in his official veto statement. “The premise of Senate Bill 265, to the extent it is discernible, is wrong and the solution it puts forth is worse.”

So far, the Alabama law has had little impact, but the breadth and vagueness of its provisions could trigger litigation if sustainability and planning measures are challenged. In April, at a meeting about an update to their general plan, the Plumas County, California, board of supervisors resisted pressure to adopt their own anti-Agenda 21 plan, a group of Tea Party activists came to object. “It was disheartening,” says Turner. “In the previous public hearing, we had 38 or 39 speakers and only about three weren’t from the Tea Party.”

In Tennessee, governor Bill Haslam, a Republican, simply declined to sign the resolution. His spokesman said this was because joint resolutions are just “position statements” of the legislature (local news outlets noted that he had apparently signed most or all previous resolutions) and stressed that Haslam “doesn’t support Agenda 21.” In Missouri, governor Nixon waited nearly two months to veto the bill.

In Arizona, last year both houses of the state legislature approved legislation (SB 1507) prohibiting its state and local governments from adopting or implementing “the creed, doctrine, principles, or any tenet of the United Nations Rio Declaration on Environment or Development and the Statement of Principles for Sustainable Development” adopted at the 1992 conference. It also banned local governments from participation in ICLEI and other sustainability programs, including those associated with the federal government’s President’s Council on Sustainable Development, established by President Clinton in 1993.

The state’s business community was alarmed, and swung into action. But the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry kept their concerns under radar, quietly lobbying legislators directly in a successful effort to stop the bill from reaching the governor’s desk. Speaker Garrick Taylor told the Arizona Republic newspaper that the group was concerned about “potential impact on business in the state. But it didn’t hold any press conferences or put out any press releases or position papers on the subject.

This year, the state Senate approved a bill (SB 1405) that would have prohibited Arizona’s state and local governments from “directly and knowingly, for the express purpose of adopting or implementing the United Nations Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Statement of Principles for Sustainable Development, expending any sum of money for, being a member of, receiving funding from, contracting services from, or giving financial or other forms of aid to any group that espouses the usurping or overthrow of the Constitution of the United States.” It died in the state House.

FIGHTING FEAR WITH INFORMATION

Political calculation has driven lot of this activity, but some of the support behind it is based on legitimate fears. After years of sluggish economic growth and flat or falling property values in a lot of communities, it shouldn’t be surprising that people are afraid of losing more ground, says Ken Stahl, a law professor at Chapman University and the director of its Environmental, Land Use, and Real Estate Law certificate program.

He notes the irony of an anti-government campaign against a lifestyle made possible by lavish government subsidies for road building and home ownership.

But I think it’s a good sign that Tea Party voters are becoming active in land use politics,” he told me. “Planners have always fantasized about activism at the meta level, but they seem befuddled when people are actually interested!”

That interest can be channeled in a useful way. I talked to Kirk Turner, the planning director for Chesterfield County, Virginia, in 2012 after I read that a Tea Party group called the Virginia Campaign for Liberty was taking credit for defeating the county’s comprehensive growth plan.

He told me that the planning office staff and a steering committee made up of local residents reviewed and held meetings on a plan developed by a consultant. But at a board meeting to adopt the plan, a group of Tea Party activists came to object.

“It was disheartening,” says Turner. “In the previous election, growth management was a big issue. People wanted us to update the plan. But when we got to the public hearing, we had 38 or 39 speakers and only about three weren’t from the Tea Party.”

The planning commission decided to rewrite the plan, making it easier to understand. “In retrospect,” says Turner, “I think this will result in a better plan. We’re taking the work the consultants and the steering committee did, but writing a cleaner, more simple document.

In April, the Plumas County supervisors considered a resolution noting the unforseable nature of Agenda 21. But instead, they decided to meet the protestors head-on and rebut their claims.

“I started naming things we already do that are subsidized by the government, or where we get help from NGOs, like public health and road repairs and transportation for seniors,” supervisor Lori Simpson told me over the summer. One of her colleagues explained to protestors that grants, which many of them had complained about, were necessary to build capital projects such as hospitals and support the rural county’s farmers with USDA funding.

“Once I started reading out what we had, and what we could lose, it quieted down,” says Simpson. She’s optimistic that their new general plan will be adopted later this fall.

It’s even possible Gateway I will be resurrected. Volunteers have continued to meet and look for other ways to bring the plan to fruition. Steve Ryan, who chairs the group, told me in late September that they are actively looking for ways to combat misinformation and educate the public about the real nature of the plan. He has suggested a series of town meetings or debates, but many of his fellow volunteers, frustrated by experience, are reluctant to pursue this course.

That frustration is understandable, especially in light of all of the work that went into creating the Gateway I plan. “We spent a lot of effort on concerns about crowding in town centers balanced with protecting the interests of rural landowners,” says Evan Richert, the town planner for Orozto, who was involved in Gateway I. He says the deep suspicion of the anti-Agenda 21 campaigners is a minority view. “I think this is a political moment that will pass. As the economy improves, people be more concerned about their quality of life.”
LAZYFISH OUT OF WATER

Sitting behind the driver of a “moto”—the low-powered cross between a motorcycle and a scooter—one of the few things I knew about Phnom Penh, Cambodia’s capital and largest city, when I visited there in the summer of 2004, was where I was headed: The Lazyfish. I had been directed to the “guesthouses” that lined parts of Boeung Kak Lake (pronounced like the words “young” and “lock”), in a neighborhood, aptly named Lakeside, of restaurants, bars, and brothels, which catered to lower-end, backpacking tourists. The Lazyfish was a completely wooden structure built on two semi-connected docks jutting out onto the lake. The family that ran the establishment would occasionally eat what they caught from the lake. Boeung Kak Lake itself was anything but sanitary: garbage swarmed the bank and the legs of the docks, the gravity toilets emptying directly into the water. In fact, most of the housing in Lakeside seemed to be of low quality and I was informed was not connected to the “guesthouses” that lined parts of Boeung Kak Lake, in downtown Phnom Penh, served as one of the city’s main aquifers, as well as a catchment during the monsoon rains.1

Only, in the last few years, and clearly visible on satellite images, developers have drained the entire lake and filled it in with sand.2 They intend to transform this prime real estate into high-end office space, retail and entertainment outlets, and housing. The government has said this is necessary development in a city and country woefully devoid of adequate housing. But housing for whom?3 The effect so far has been the displacement of thousands of families, deprived of their land and in some cases their livelihood, as many residents were employed by or owners of the tourist-trade businesses in the area, and often with little or no compensation. Unfortunately, what happened at Boeung Kak Lake is just a symptom of the larger problem of land rights in Phnom Penh, and throughout the country. For a population all too familiar with the violence and political upheaval of “pakdivat,” Khmer (the Cambodian national language) for revolution, impoverished Cambodians are now being threatened by “akdivat,” or development—what many advocate as a condition to alleviate their deprivation.

HUO SEN: FROM KHMER ROUGE TO CAMBODIAN PEOPLE’S PARTY

Phnom Penh International Airport has a surprisingly contemporary and opulent terminal, like a casino’s hotel lobby, in a country where, following the brief but efficiently tyrannical Khmer Rouge regime, in the late 1970s, a civil war had raged throughout the 1980s. Phnom Penh had been the seat of the Khmer Rouge government while in power and the main locus of their genocidal attention, an attempt to rid the former French colonial city of its Western-influenced civil society. They wanted to expunge what modernity had taken hold in Cambodia, remaking the entire population into the pre-industrial agrarian civilization, as much of the country had still been subsisting—a Cultural Revolution as a springboard for a Great Leap Backwards.4 The name Pol Pot, the former leader of the Khmer Rouge, is as familiar to many as Hitler, Stalin, or Mao. But Hun Sen, the sitting prime minister of Cambodia, is rather less infamous. Still, this once glamorous airport on the outskirts of the city was all but destroyed in one of the final battle scenes of the coup d’État last act that gave Hun Sen and his Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) essentially dictatorial rule over the nominally democratic nation, which they have preserved to this day.5

To be sure, the Hun Sen government has never come close to the human devastation wrought by the erstwhile authoritarians mentioned above. Compared to the reign of the Khmer Rouge, the CPP seems restrained while still thoroughly autocratic. Hun Sen had been a high-ranking Khmer Rouge member until surging internal purges by Pol Pot persuaded him to defect to their enemy, Vietnam.6 With backing from the Vietnamese government, Hun Sen pushed the Khmer Rouge out of Phnom Penh, and the two factions then fought a civil war, in the 1980s. Hun Sen, perhaps learning a few things from his former comrades, dropped the communist moniker, despite the warming trend of Cold War in the 80s, without relinquishing his allegiance to Vietnam, and constrained his use of force to political violence against opposition leaders and media dissent, as opposed to outright genocide. While Cambodians were in the process of rebuilding their country throughout the 90s, beginning with the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)-monitored election in 93, the CPP perpetrated periodic bouts of violence against their fellow citizens who dared challenge Hun Sen’s effective despotism, culminating in the CPP’s 97 coup of the elected governing coalition, a power sharing agreement of which the they had been partner.7

However, for the first time since the UNTAC era, a coalition of the two biggest opposition parties, which held 29 of the 123 national assembly seats, and many more members in local councils outside of the capital, joined forces to marshal a reasonably formidable challenge to the CPP in national elections this past summer.8 The results were cause for tempered optimism: while the opposition coalition picked up a total of 55 assembly seats and the CPP reduced its number of assembly members from 90 to 68, there were still widespread reports of voting irregularities, which aroused limited but violent protests.9 Although the Cambodian government is called a “multiparty democracy,” scrolling down a list of “main government ministries,” there is only one non-CPP member.10 Perhaps these elections can start to chip away at what has effectively been one-party rule.

HOUSING: FROM KHMER ROUGE TO CPP

When the Khmer Rouge initially took Phnom Penh, they cleared the city’s population and abolished all claims to private property across the country.11 Once the Khmer Rouge government was pushed out of the capital, most surviving citizens remained in the countryside, avoiding the ensuing civil war. In the 1990s, with the civil war waning, refugees from all over the country poured into Phnom Penh. Many built shantytowns with the scarce land and materials
available along an annually flooding river delta, most of which were not connected to any infrastructure. Some settled near the city center, like the homes around Boeung Kak Lake, while others spread throughout the metro area.

Most refugees, lacking clear title to their land, are now under attack—often literally. Even more disturbing than the clear unjustness of these land seizures, not to mention the corruption associated with many of them, has been the violence: intimidation, forced migration, imprisonment, and even murder. Tactics once reserved by the CPP for political opponents, human rights activists, and investigative journalists are now being deployed on the general population. And although the government’s public housing agency promises to build affordable housing for the displaced, few resources have been designated to carry this out. The bulk of new development is market-rate housing built by private interests for an international community of businesses and nonprofits that retains a heavy presence and accommodations for tourists—these groups still significant to Phnom Penh’s economy—as well as the bourgeoning but relatively small amount of middle and upper class Cambodians.

In response to criticism that international consortiums were being granted too much Cambodian public and private land, the CPP passed the 2001 Land Law.14 Because most Cambodians did not have legal ownership of the land they lived on, the law provided a path for the granting of land titles to those who could prove residence for at least one year. By squatters, mostly refugees from the years of civil strife, had little proof to offer—all of Boeung Kak Lake residents’ applications were denied. From 2003 to 2008, some thirty thousand people have been evicted from homes within Phnom Penh, over twelve thousand in 2010, alone.15 In the last decade, between 500, 000 and 450, 000 Cambodians are said to have been displaced by what many consider government land grabs. Astonishingly, this still took place concurrently with a different land-titling program supervised by the World Bank, in cooperation with the Cambodian government.16

Displacement begs protest
Still, in the apparent responsiveness of the CPP to popular protest, international pressure, and internal political dissent, there are signals the regime’s dominance might be waning. In early 2007, a Chinese firm Shukaku, with connections to cabinet officials, was granted a ninety-nine year lease for the development of Boeung Kak Lake.17 Unfortunately, as has often been the case with the CPP, words are not transformed into deeds: the government has yet to delineate exactly what land would be returned.20 This time, however, it was the residents who rejected the deal as “inadequate compensation,” a promising sign that it is not only international NGOs that have the audacity to stand up to the Hun Sen administration. Nonetheless, it has been estimated that ten thousand residents of the lake were displaced in 2011.21

Yet, what has transpired more recently at Boeung Kak Lake might be a catalyst for further backlash against the CPP. In 2012, a group of women residents, dubbed the Boeung Kak 13, protesting the seizure of the land even after they were evicted, were arrested and convicted of illegal trespass.22 Internal and external human rights groups began a campaign for their release. Widespread support, such as that of former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, coalesced around the women, including—perhaps most significantly going forward—that of everyday Cambodians. All of which resulted in the women being released early on appeal.

Challenging the CPP
Why the sudden acquiescence of the judiciary, long known for expressing the will of the CPP?18 It is possible Hun Sen and the CPP were bowing to external forces. Because of the exceedingly rare CPP-opposition members of the Cambodian parliament, Mu Sochua, wrote in a New York Times op-ed at the time, “Local NGOs, Cambodian legislators and the media all have a part to play in stopping these abuses through advocacy. But as the World Bank’s intervention last year shows, foreign governments and international organisations can also help.”19

At the same time, as Asia’s most recent “tiger” economy, steady economic growth in Cambodia seems to have quieted the protests from Cambodia’s and foreign aid groups—similar to the dilemma regarding relations with China, presently Hun Sen’s main backer.22 While Sochua and others have called for the US to halt all military aid to Cambodia, they have also asked the European Union to limit the Everything But Arms program, intended to spur country’s developing export trade, which they say has perversely incentivized land seizures by government officials. Still, Hun Sen is at least paying lip service to the question of land rights—even if, like his recent call for the cessation of controversial land concessions, has not yet been translated into reality.23

In early December of 2012, a vast land-titling scheme was reported to have completed its first phase with over fifty thousand titles granted.24 The plan, announced in May, would eventually impact almost half a million people, mostly poor farmers. However, despite the claim otherwise in its initial rollout, it was recently stated that the program would not include any disputed land. Mainly for this reason, the UN, the World Bank, and the Cambodian rights group Adhoc are pleased with the scheme. They all believe a better way to arbitrate disputed land titles is needed. Even when the courts, currently the only remaining route of disputed land title with those threatened with eviction, are often ignored; later that month, another Phnom Penh neighborhood was destroyed in spite of the court’s verdict in their favor. What seems to be taking place now, arguably, is that land titling will no longer succeed for the disenfranchised denizens of Phnom Penh.

Road to reform?
Of course, Cambodians are understandably leery of these calls for legal land titles. Though it might not be as easy now for the CPP to thwart their opposition, given a growing political consciousness and increasing intolerance of authoritarian rule at home and abroad, Hun Sen and the CPP with the support of China and Vietnam, might hold on for some time. The current political situation in the capital is perhaps best conveyed by the ongoing circumcision of Cambodia’s “tiger” economy, as Asia’s most recent “tiger” economy...
under the manhattan bridge on the manhattan side, you’ll find yourself feeling time-warped to the aggressive skate videos of the 90s.

you will probably also notice the extreme diversity of the skaters, fearlessly negotiating time and space—

a comforting scene that in one place at least, the raucous, edgy vibe that Lower Manhattan once was famous for is alive and well.

Natsumi Yokura is a student in the Master of Urban Planning program at Hunter College. Her interests are in transportation and community planning. She expects to graduate Spring 2014.
The demand is there, but the United States doesn’t have courses for learners for whom English is a second language. English language acquisition is a big thing. We know that an international student, get a job, and decide to stay, from your country of origin, or if you’re coming here as immigrants and their children to do well, right? What’s important to understand is that Asian immigration post-1960s has been really bifurcated economically speaking. Partly this dates back to the last great era of immigration and socio-economic status? I’ll back into the question by noting that before the civil rights movement in the mid-1960s there was a lot of residential segregation, as well as school segregation, and since then there has been desegregation. But what has been very troubling is that, from the 1990s through today, we’ve been seeing re-segregation of our nation’s public schools. For example, we have an increase in majority minority schools, which tend to be located in struggling urban areas with much amounts of poverty. Since everything is local in education, those schools tend to be struggling themselves, with fewer resources, high teacher turnover, and low rates of credentialed teachers. The children who need resources the most are the least likely to get them, so that’s of course a big challenge.

Do you think that there’s some truth to the model minority myth? It does have some of an empirical basis, but I think that what’s important to understand is that Asian immigration post-1960s has been really bifurcated economically speaking. You have folks who are coming in as low or unskilled labor, without a lot of education from their countries of origin, but you also have folks who are coming in with very high levels of education, college and beyond, who are among the most skilled immigrants ever to come to the United States. We would expect these highly educated immigrants and their children to do well, right?

What are some other factors that contribute to certain immigrant groups achieving more success than others? The context of reception and the context of exit are major factors. If you’re coming in with formal schooling from your country of origin, or if you’re coming here as an international student, get a job, and decide to stay, those are very different ways of arriving into the country than if you’re coming in undocumented or with very few levels of education and you don’t speak English. English language acquisition is a big thing. We know that we don’t have enough resources, meaning English language courses, for learners for whom English is a second language. The demand is there, but the United States doesn’t have enough resources across the board to meet that demand. That leads also to the whole issue of institutions—that institutions really matter. How well an immigrant individual does is about more than just how motivated that person is or the group to which the person belongs. It’s a function of how institutions in America make entry into America welcoming or not.

In your most recent book, Keeping the Immigrant Bargain, you have a very enticing title. Can you tell us about what it means and the role that the immigrant bargain plays in educational achievement? The immigrant bargain is a term that was coined by Robert C. Smith, who is at Baruch College and the CUNY Graduate Center. The immigrant bargain is the bargain that’s made between immigrant parents and their children in America: it means that the children acknowledge that their parents made huge sacrifices in deciding to immigrate, often times to provide them with a better education. To make up for these sacrifices the children want to meet their parents’ goals—to do well in school, to get a good job, and to have some upward mobility in the United States.

What do you see as the main differences between the immigrant experience in urban versus suburban spaces, especially in terms of residential segregation and socio-economic status? I have a new book contract with a coauthor, Evangeline Harris Stefanakis at Boston University, and Harvard Education Press, called Achieving the Dream: Educators, Immigrants and the Paths to College. It looks at best practices and programs for immigrant learners across the developmental span from Pre-K through college. I’d like to do some new research, ideally with folks in the Urban Affairs and Planning department here at Hunter, looking at the development of cross-class ties. To give you an example, Colombian immigrants in the United States have very diverse class backgrounds—working, middle and upper middle—but the interesting thing is that they don’t develop strong ties or linkages across different classes once they’re in the US. Members of the working class do not benefit from knowledge that middle class and upper class folks could share with them about schooling, adjustment, jobs, etc. It turns out that this is not the case in every immigrant community—some communities, like the Chinese in greater New York City, develop very strong cross-class ties. I’d like to examine where these ties come from and how they are experienced by individuals across the class divide in the case of Chinese American New Yorkers.

What’s next? I know you just published your most recent book last year, but are you currently working on anything new? First of all we need to acknowledge and change the popular understanding that all immigrants need to do to achieve success is to have optimism and motivation. I mean it’s pretty clear that they have that—one doesn’t just pick up and leave without having some sort of chutzpah. I argue that we need to focus on the institutional aspect of the picture, which is not typically part of how we understand success in America. There are lots of things that institutions could do to promote the success of immigrant populations.

For example, facilitating funding and knowledge linkages between community-based organizations, which often times serve different immigrant populations within the same urban space but don’t know about one another. There’s no national initiative to integrate community-based organizations or even umbrella organizations of community-based groups to figure out best practices. Having some type of federal office of immigrant integration would be wonderful, some type of capacity at the federal level to bring resources, knowledge, and people together into the same room. And, of course, investing in our public schools. They are educating close to 90% of all Americans, so we really need to be investing in our teachers.
THE SPRAWLING AMERICAN DREAM:

In referring to the subject of his 1931 book, The Epic of America, as “that American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank,” the author James Truslow Adams coined the phrase that has resonated in the American psyche ever since. The idea of the American Dream, however, has been present from the earliest days of the country, though its definition has always been elusive. For some it is purely the acquisition of wealth; for others it is the ability to rise from poverty to middle-class stability; while for others it is simply the hope that their children will have a better life than they did. For many Americans in the last 60 years the primary symbol of achieving the American dream has been the suburban home—a single family, multi-bedroom home on a plot of land large enough for front and back yards, and a garage, often filled with multiple cars.

This suburban vision of the American Dream did not happen by accident. Federal policies following World War II—including Federal Housing Authority and Veterans Administration loans, as well as tax-deductible mortgage interest—encouraged homeownership and a consequent middle class urban exodus in favor of the suburban fringe. Adding to and amplifying this move away from central cities was President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, which launched a 41,000-mile (66,000-kilometer) interstate highway system. Intended to connect the country as well as to provide means of escape should the Cold War become hot, the primary effect of the Highway Act was to encourage people of means to move out of cities and commute by car. In tandem with the federal push for home ownership, the Highway Act launched rapid suburbanization and the outward development pattern that came to be known as “urban sprawl.”

URBAN SPRAWL

“Urban sprawl,” coined by sociologist William Whyte in a 1958 essay, is a commonly used term in the planning vernacular, but one that, like the American Dream, is difficult to define. Related to uncontrolled, low-density, automobile-dependent development, sprawl can be recognized in the seemingly endless cookie-cutter housing developments, office parks, strip malls, and crowded highways of Dallas, Atlanta, Phoenix, and countless other American cities. It is undeniable that many, perhaps most, Americans see the suburban lifestyle as an ideal to be aspired to—larger homes, more open space, better schools, and safer streets. However, many sociologists, planners, and environmentalists see urban sprawl as something much less benign. In fact, urban sprawl seems to have a profoundly negative effect on many aspects of human existence, creating social isolation, poverty. This kind of socioeconomic segregation negatively affects economic mobility, first, by limiting access to jobs, and second, by limiting access to quality education. This is not to say that sprawl causes concentration of isolated areas of concentrated poverty. This kind of socioeconomic segregation negatively affects economic mobility, first, by limiting access to jobs, and second, by limiting access to quality education.

Comparing Economic Mobility and Sprawl

Smart Growth America’s 2002 study, “Measuring Sprawl and Its Impact,” assigns a “sprawl score” to 83 metropolitan areas in the U.S. (representing nearly half of the nation’s population) based on four factors: residential density; neighborhood mix of homes, jobs, and services (“mixed use”); strength of activity centers and downtowns (“centeredness”); and accessibility of the street network. In looking at the sprawl scores of the top and bottom ten cities in economic mobility, the less sprawling cities like New York, San Francisco, and Boston tend to have more economic mobility, while the less sprawling cities like Atlanta, Detroit, and Raleigh tend to have less economic mobility.

Comparing Economic Mobility and Segregation

While the recent Equality of Opportunity Project study seems to show a correlation between urban sprawl and limited economic mobility, it does not directly address any mechanism by which sprawl may cause limited mobility. However, other research shows that such a causative mechanism can be found in the relationship between sprawl and socioeconomic segregation. The logic of this causation hinges on the fact that urban sprawl tends to sharply separate social classes and create isolated areas of concentrated poverty. This kind of socioeconomic segregation negatively affects economic mobility, first, by limiting access to jobs, and second, by limiting access to quality education.

Social and Economic Mobility: Is the American Dream Suffering in Sprawling Cities?

In July of this year, economists at The Equality of Opportunity Project presented results of a study that showed a strong relationship between geographic location and economic mobility in the United States. While the goal of the study was to assess the impact of tax expenditures on intergenerational mobility (which was found to be minimal), the most important findings were geographic. Looking at the odds of a person starting in the bottom income quintile and moving to the top income quintile, researchers found that “Some areas [of the U.S.] have rates of upward mobility comparable to the most mobile countries in the world while others have lower rates of mobility than any developed country for which data are currently available.”

While researchers are careful to note that their findings do not show causation for the disparity in economic mobility across the country, only strong correlation, they report that income mobility was higher in areas with more two-parent households, better elementary schools and high schools, and more civic engagement, including membership in religious and community groups. What may be the most important finding, however, is that areas in which low income individuals were residually segregated from middle income individuals were also particularly likely to have low rates of upward mobility.

While the recent Equality of Opportunity Project study seems to show a correlation between urban sprawl and limited economic mobility, it does not directly address any mechanism by which sprawl may cause limited mobility. However, other research shows that such a causative mechanism can be found in the relationship between sprawl and socioeconomic segregation. The logic of this causation hinges on the fact that urban sprawl tends to sharply separate social classes and create isolated areas of concentrated poverty. This kind of socioeconomic segregation negatively affects economic mobility, first, by limiting access to jobs, and second, by limiting access to quality education.

SUBURBANIZATION, SEGREGATION, AND THE DEATH OF ECONOMIC MOBILITY

BY GRIFF BRAUN

In 2012, L. Brooks Patterson, the county executive of Oakland County, Michigan, paid tribute to the dominant American development pattern of the last half century, stating: “I love [urban] sprawl. I need it. I promote it. ‘Sprawl’ is new houses, new school buildings, new plants, and new office and retail facilities. ‘Sprawl’ is new jobs, new hope and the fulfillment of lifelong dreams. It’s the American Dream unfolding before your eyes.”

Recent studies, however, challenge fundamental notions of American identity by indicating that urban sprawl, so lauded by Mr. Patterson and so prevalent across the country, may in fact be killing the American Dream by limiting economic mobility.

In referring to the subject of his 1931 book, The Epic of America, as “that American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank,” the author James Truslow Adams coined the phrase that has resonated in the American psyche ever since. The idea of the American Dream, however, has been present from the earliest days of the country, though its definition has always been elusive. For some it is purely the acquisition of wealth; for others it is the ability to rise from poverty to middle-class stability; while for others it is simply the hope that their children will have a better life than they did. For many Americans in the last 60 years the primary symbol of achieving the American dream has been the suburban home—a single family, multi-bedroom home on a plot of land large enough for front and back yards, and a garage, often filled with multiple cars.

This suburban vision of the American Dream did not happen by accident. Federal policies following World War II—including Federal Housing Authority and Veterans Administration loans, as well as tax-deductible mortgage interest—encouraged homeownership and a consequent middle class urban exodus in favor of the suburban fringe. Adding to and amplifying this move away from central cities was President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, which launched a 41,000-mile (66,000-kilometer) interstate highway system. Intended to connect the country as well as to provide means of escape should the Cold War become hot, the primary effect of the Highway Act was to encourage people of means to move out of cities and commute by car. In tandem with the federal push for home ownership, the Highway Act launched rapid suburbanization and the outward development pattern that came to be known as “urban sprawl.”

URBAN SPRAWL

“Urban sprawl,” coined by sociologist William Whyte in a 1958 essay, is a commonly used term in the planning vernacular, but one that, like the American Dream, is difficult to define. Related to uncontrolled, low-density, automobile-dependent development, sprawl can be recognized in the seemingly endless cookie-cutter housing developments, office parks, strip malls, and crowded highways of Dallas, Atlanta, Phoenix, and countless other American cities. It is undeniable that many, perhaps most, Americans see the suburban lifestyle as an ideal to be aspired to—larger homes, more open space, better schools, and safer streets. However, many sociologists, planners, and environmentalists see urban sprawl as something much less benign. In fact, urban sprawl seems to have a profoundly negative effect on many aspects of human existence, creating social isolation, poverty. This kind of socioeconomic segregation negatively affects economic mobility, first, by limiting access to jobs, and second, by limiting access to quality education.

Comparing Economic Mobility and Sprawl

Smart Growth America’s 2002 study, “Measuring Sprawl and Its Impact,” assigns a “sprawl score” to 83 metropolitan areas in the U.S. (representing nearly half of the nation’s population) based on four factors: residential density; neighborhood mix of homes, jobs, and services (“mixed use”); strength of activity centers and downtowns (“centeredness”); and accessibility of the street network. In looking at the sprawl scores of the top and bottom ten cities in economic mobility, the less sprawling cities like New York, San Francisco, and Boston tend to have more economic mobility, while the less sprawling cities like Atlanta, Detroit, and Raleigh tend to have less economic mobility.

Comparing Economic Mobility and Segregation

While the recent Equality of Opportunity Project study seems to show a correlation between urban sprawl and limited economic mobility, it does not directly address any mechanism by which sprawl may cause limited mobility. However, other research shows that such a causative mechanism can be found in the relationship between sprawl and socioeconomic segregation. The logic of this causation hinges on the fact that urban sprawl tends to sharply separate social classes and create isolated areas of concentrated poverty. This kind of socioeconomic segregation negatively affects economic mobility, first, by limiting access to jobs, and second, by limiting access to quality education.

Social and Economic Mobility: Is the American Dream Suffering in Sprawling Cities?

In July of this year, economists at The Equality of Opportunity Project presented results of a study that showed a strong relationship between geographic location and economic mobility in the United States. While the goal of the study was to assess the impact of tax expenditures on intergenerational mobility (which was found to be minimal), the most important findings were geographic. Looking at the odds of a person starting in the bottom income quintile and moving to the top income quintile, researchers found that “Some areas [of the U.S.] have rates of upward mobility comparable to the most mobile countries in the world while others have lower rates of mobility than any developed country for which data are currently available.”

While researchers are careful to note that their findings do not show causation for the disparity in economic mobility across the country, only strong correlation, they report that income mobility was higher in areas with more two-parent households, better elementary schools and high schools, and more civic engagement, including membership in religious and community groups. What may be the most important finding, however, is that areas in which low income individuals were residually segregated from middle income individuals were also particularly likely to have low rates of upward mobility. What the study, and this finding in particular, may also indicate is that economic mobility is negatively impacted by urban sprawl.

Comparing Economic Mobility and Segregation

While the recent Equality of Opportunity Project study seems to show a correlation between urban sprawl and limited economic mobility, it does not directly address any mechanism by which sprawl may cause limited mobility. However, other research shows that such a causative mechanism can be found in the relationship between sprawl and socioeconomic segregation. The logic of this causation hinges on the fact that urban sprawl tends to sharply separate social classes and create isolated areas of concentrated poverty. This kind of socioeconomic segregation negatively affects economic mobility, first, by limiting access to jobs, and second, by limiting access to quality education.
for the last 60 years has been, at least until recently, one of urban exodus, with middle- and upper-class (mostly white) families abandoning the denser central city for the sprawling suburbs. It is also one based in using Euclidean zoning to separate residential from commercial land uses, allowing only single family homes on large lots, and ensuring automobile dependency.14 Taken together, these things have created socioeconomic segregation that, starting in the 1950s, saw wealthier families in the suburbs and poor families isolated in central cities. Peter Dreier explains that even though there is not necessarily a logical connection between sprawl and economic segregation, there is a de facto connection. He states that “If low-density developments on the urban fringe included housing options for the poor, sprawl would not promote economic segregation. In the real world, however, sprawl is another way of separating and isolating socioeconomic classes.”15

This new pattern may actually place poor families at an even greater disadvantage. As a Brookings Institution report points out, “rather than increased opportunities and connections, being poor in poor suburban neighborhoods may mean residents face challenges similar to those that accompany concentrated disadvantage in urban areas, but with the added complication that even fewer resources are likely to exist than one might find in an urban neighborhood with access to a more robust and developed safety net.”16

Whether in inner cities or inner-ring suburbs, people who live in areas of concentrated poverty bear “significant burdens” that hamper their upward mobility.17 Primary among those burdens is isolation from jobs and poor education.

**Isolation from Jobs**

Access to jobs is a major factor in economic mobility. Gregory Squires and Charis Kubrin state that, in the United States where individuals and households are far more dependent on their jobs to secure basic goods and services than is the case with virtually all other industrialized nations, “If there is one single factor that is most critical for determining access to the good life, it might be employment.”18 The segregation of low-income families in central cities, and more recently in inner-ring suburbs, has separated them from where job growth has been strongest—in outlying suburbs.19

Urban sprawl is a primary factor in separating the poor from entry-level jobs. Eliza Hall states that:

“As the middle and upper classes moved to residential suburbs, jobs followed: suburban municipalities used zoning to turn former farmland and wilderness into commercial and industrial parks, so in the 1980s alone, suburbs received 99% of new office jobs and 120% of net manufacturing job growth. This shift in the location of offices and manufacturing plants changed urban centers from centers of production and distribution of material goods to centers of administration, information exchange, and higher-order service provision. As a result, jobs remaining in the downtown core require higher levels of education, which many city residents do not possess.”20

Hall goes on to explain that lack of car ownership among the urban poor (just one in twenty welfare recipients owns a car) and typically inadequate public transportation combine to create a scenario where appropriate jobs are virtually inaccessible to those who need them.21

This creates what Harvard economist John Kain in 1968 called a “spatial mismatch.” Kain used simple statistical techniques to show that housing segregation prevented Chicago’s black (and poor) population from following jobs out to the suburbs.22 Contrary to market theory, which maintains that people should move closer to jobs to minimize spatial mismatches, in America’s metropolitan areas jobs and people often move in opposite directions.23

Not only does socioeconomic segregation physically separate the poor from jobs, it also limits their ability to find those jobs. Neighborhoods provide networks of essential information about jobs; more than half of all jobs are found through friends and relatives, not through want ads. In neighborhoods of isolated poverty and high unemployment, social networks are less valuable in helping find work, no matter how skilled or hardworking one happens to be.24

With poor access to jobs, residents of these neighborhoods are less likely to succeed. Economic segregation is thus a major barrier to achieving the “fundamental American value...
of equal opportunity." Without that opportunity, the economic mobility of those who have been socioeconomically segregated due to urban sprawl is dramatically reduced.

Inadequate Education: The Curse of Concentrated Poverty

The second major factor limiting the economic mobility of the segregated poor is inadequate education. Studies show that, at the individual level, education leads to higher incomes, better access to jobs, higher social status, increased participation in civil society, and better health.34 Across a large amount of empirical studies economists have found that exposure to high quality schools—as measured by test scores, peer effects, and teacher quality—substantially increases the probability of economic success later in life.35

However, neighborhoods of segregated poverty typically have public schools that have lower academic performance than those in middle- and upper-class areas. Likewise, children from low-income families typically have lower academic performance than those from middle- and upper-class families. Nationwide, the average low-income student attends a school that scores at the 42nd percentile on state exams, while the average middle- and high-income student attends a school that scores at the 61st percentile on state exams.36

This has nothing to do with the individual intelligence of the children. Displacement, or with social conditions present in concentrated poverty neighborhoods that handicap their ability to learn. He states that: “Poor children are more likely to move frequently, and poor neighborhoods are less stable. Poor children are more likely to be malnourished and to come to school tired, and they are less likely to have books at home and parents who read with them.”37

Additionally, it seems that when students who grow up in the above described conditions are surrounded only by other students in the same circumstances—as is the case in areas of segregated poverty—there is little chance that any will receive a quality education. Schools with large concentrations of poor students tend to score poorly on standardized tests, even when they spend as much money per pupil as wealthier suburban schools.38

James Coleman, in his well-known 1966 study, Equality of Educational Opportunity, found that the educational resources that a child’s classmates bring to school are more important than the educational resources that the school board provides. The social composition of the student body is more highly related to achievement than is any school factor.39 Because of this, when poverty is concentrated and segregated, and poor children are only surrounded by other poor children, they are, for all intents and purposes, doomed to a poor education.

As with jobs, quality schools themselves are not the only education-related component lacking in neighborhoods of isolated poverty—beneficial social connections that middle- and upper-class students are privy to are absent as well. As Dreier explains: “Not only do children in rich school districts get a better education; they also make contacts (through internships, jobs, and college admission connections) that help them to succeed.”35

Quality education is, as mentioned above, an essential component of upward mobility. Because the isolated poor have little chance for a decent education or beneficial social contacts that would enhance that education, their economic mobility is almost certainly severely limited.

Conclusion: When Urban Sprawl Isolates the Poor It Kills the American Dream

While the American Dream can be defined in many ways, at its heart is the notion of economic mobility, the ability of individuals to rise above poverty through hard work. Urban sprawl, a development pattern encouraged by federal policy and arising from a materialistic vision of the American Dream, suppresses that economic mobility by creating and exacerbating socioeconomic segregation. By isolating those who live in poverty—with inner cities and increasingly in inner-ring suburbs—sprawl separates the poor from jobs, ensures they receive sub-standard education, and removes them from social networks that aid in the search for work and educational opportunities.

The Equality of Opportunity Project study seems to show a correlation between urban sprawl and economic mobility, though further study needs to be done. However, taking the above factors into consideration, it would be surprising if future studies based on geography and economic mobility did not show a strong correlation with urban sprawl.

Going forward, should further study verify the causal connection between sprawl and economic mobility, government could implement policies to address the lack of mobility in certain cities. The primary goal of these policies should be to encourage socioeconomic integration. As Paul Waldman states, “When poor people are disbursed throughout the area alongside middle-class people, they’ll inevitably be closer to a greater number of businesses where they might work, not to mention the fact that the schools to which they send their kids will likely be better funded.”36

Policy options to consider might be: urban boundaries, beyond which development could not take place (Portland, Oregon is an example); eliminating exclusionary zoning policies that make it impossible to build affordable housing in many suburbs; socioeconomic integration of schools through voluntary busing and magnet schools; and funding extensive upgrades to public transit to allow low-income workers better access to jobs. However, for many Americans, the isolated suburban lifestyle is still an ideal, making any substantive policy efforts to deal with sprawl-induced economic segregation politically difficult.

Urban planners could play an important role in helping to restore the American Dream, though, by creating and re-creating appealing urban landscapes and making cities generally more attractive. If middle- and upper-income families could be drawn back to cities voluntarily, existing neighborhoods could be densified and the kind of socioeconomic integration that facilitates economic mobility could be created. In this way, perhaps the most vital element of the American Dream could be made more of a reality.

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
22. Dreier et al.
24. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid, 38.
32. Ibid, 3.
33. Ibid.
34. Dreier, 2004, 164.
Although government entities have increasingly stepped up their attempts to address the problems of housing India’s urban poor (a problem compounded by rapid urbanization and population growth), a stubborn legacy of intransigence and corruption dog their efforts and saps their credibility. Meanwhile, interventions on all fronts fail to do much to actually provide adequate shelter for very poor people. Labyrinthine bureaucracies, widespread poverty, an improving economy, and legacies of colonial rule overlap to create a dizzying planning atmosphere in India. With government entities perpetually slow to respond to the housing challenge (and with their efforts largely ineffective when implemented), increasingly powerful private sector interests representing the middle and upper classes have dominated the discourse on housing inclusion, which—especially since the global economic crisis of 2009—has loudly pounded the drums of western neoliberal-style reforms. Private sector developers and financiers, or their proxies, control the context of housing discussions, framing the debate in ways that advance their agenda of eroding government controls they deem detrimental and strengthening the state’s private property protections in ways that would reinforce private sector power.

The story of India’s ascendant private sector begins with failures of government a generation ago. In the mid-1980s, rural-to-urban migration, which had accelerated dramatically failures of government a generation ago. In the mid-1980s, rural-to-urban migration, which had accelerated dramatically since 1971 it has doubled almost every twenty years, from urban population doubled roughly every thirty years, but in the 1970s, began to overwhelm the resources available to India’s urban municipalities. From 1911 to 1961, India’s urban population doubled roughly every thirty years, but in the 1970s, began to overwhelm the resources available to India’s urban municipalities. From 1911 to 1961, India’s urban population doubled roughly every thirty years, but in the 1970s, began to overwhelm the resources available to India’s urban municipalities. From 1911 to 1961, India’s urban population doubled roughly every thirty years, but in the 1970s, began to overwhelm the resources available to India’s urban municipalities. From 1911 to 1961, India’s urban population doubled roughly every thirty years, but in the 1970s, began to overwhelm the resources available to India’s urban municipalities. From 1911 to 1961, India’s urban population doubled roughly every thirty years, but in the 1970s, began to overwhelm the resources available to India’s urban municipalities. From 1911 to 1961, India’s urban population doubled roughly every thirty years, but in the 1970s, began to overwhelm the resources available to India’s urban municipalities. From 1911 to 1961, India’s urban population doubled roughly every thirty years, but in the 1970s, began to overwhelm the resources available to India’s urban municipalities.

As migrants faced decreasing supplies of housing, municipalities responded either not at all or by instituting controls they vainly hoped would dissuade migration. As Mark Bergen notes of Mumbai, “Much of the city’s stringent land use rules were put in place to keep migrants from other states out. But migrants came nonetheless, and they settled without brick and mortar.” Rural transplants were willing to put up with the drawbacks of improvised housing in order to access the relative advantages of large cities. Officials adapted slowly to the phenomenon of mass informal housing, or addressed it violently, dismantling ad hoc shelters in the name of public safety and law enforcement; India did not attempt a positive solution to the crisis by way of its National Housing Policy until 1994, by which time slums were legion and their attendant miseries - driven by lack of access to clean water and sewers - had become epidemic.

For the next fifteen years, authorities at every level tried to play catch-up, but the enormity of the urban housing problem overwhelmed their resources. Informally housed Indians, however, wanted housing solutions and voted frequently in the high-end Indian real estate market. Weakened demand, overbuilt supply, and speculative enthusiasm combined to soak developers and investors alike. “Real estate companies in India have been suffering for some years with big debts, high interest rates and high inflation, leaving them starved of liquidity,” wrote Avantika Chilklari in 2013. But post-2009, the cash-poor private sector discovered opportunities in housing the LIG and EWS, viewing the provision of shelter for the lower classes as a hedge commodity; as Mayank puts it, the “Affordable housing segment provides an appropriate option to diversify [developers’] risk.” Enormous pent-up demand—more than 20 million under-housed Indians were going nowhere fast—meant that builders stood to make money on sheer volume alone, especially when foreseeing the most expensive land for less desirable parcels on urban peripheries.

If Indian governments handled mass housing poorly, the private building sector ignored it entirely. Developers saw no profit in what they called the “economically weaker section” (or EWS, their preferred nomenclature for the poorest of the poor) and “lower income groups” (LIG, analogous to the working class), instead focusing on homes for luxury segments and a steadily burgeoning middle class. One reason is that land prices—particularly in large cities like Mumbai—were so high that merely acquiring the plots put any hope of profitable return from low-income occupants out of reach. An additional difficulty was that developers were so risk-averse (or the real estate industry in India so blinkered) that they would not build apartments unless future occupants financed construction in advance, which worked out alright for wealthy people but helped leave a sizable proportion of the population quite literally in the dust.

Land prices in large cities remain high today, which invites private sector gripeing—especially since so much land is under government control. One anonymous architect complained to Lakshmi Ajay about a scheme in Ahmedabad that “Affordable housing has been granted in areas that have high land value, which is in complete mismatch with the concept of affordability.” And as Bergen observes, “Although construction costs are rising, land acquisition is often a bulk of the development costs and nearly all the hassle,” due to an unwieldy bureaucracy rife with corruption. According to Himadri Mayank, et al., “Most of these [state-owned] land parcels are located in central areas, as they have been inherited colonially... These areas also provide for proliferation of slums and squatter settlements, as authorities are often incapable of monitoring their own holdings regularly.” Although we are right to be skeptical of every whinge made by developers and financiers—is there ever enough profit to be made?—we might also allow them some measure of credibility, especially as Indian government so clearly cannot get out of its own way.

By most accounts, however, the private sector low-income housing dynamic underwent a major shift in the wake of the 2009 global recession and the subsequent collapse of the high-end Indian real estate market. Weakened demand, out-of-reach. An additional difficulty was that developers any hope of profitable return from low-income occupants out of reach. An additional difficulty was that developers were so risk-averse (or the real estate industry in India so blinkered) that they would not build apartments unless future occupants financed construction in advance, which worked out alright for wealthy people but helped leave a sizable proportion of the population quite literally in the dust. Enormous pent-up demand—more than 20 million under-housed Indians were going nowhere fast—meant that builders stood to make money on sheer volume alone, especially when foreseeing the most expensive land for less desirable parcels on urban peripheries. Of course—as in the west—“affordability” is “a non-specific term, the meaning of which changes with the context being considered.” Nonetheless, some private sector entities have separately created surprisingly specific criteria in an attempt to hem “affordability” in. For instance, international auditing giant KPMG pegs Indian flats up to 300 square feet whose costs are thirty to forty percent of an EWS worker’s wage (they earn less than 150,000 rupees, or a little over 2,700 dollars, a year) as “affordable” for the EWS. Widely-used definitions like KPMG’s might appear useful in theory, but

**FRAMING THE CONVERSATION ON INCLUSION AND ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN INDIA**

**BY SHELDON BAKER**

*Mumbai, India. Photo by kunal.bhatia on flickr.*
The prevalence of cheap, illegal construction techniques in Indian cities is abetted not only by the fact that government resources are inadequate to the task of regulating the construction industry, but also because the Indian government’s bureaucratic complexity incentivizes bribery. Alam Sirinivas explains that “to complete a sizeable property project, any builder in India is granted 60 approvals, produce about 175 documents, and deal with 40 central, state and local government departments.”34 In part because builders have an incentive to proceed speedily through the approval process, bribing low-level officials—engineers, building inspectors, and the like—is normative and widespread. In addition, property transaction fees extracted by the government are relatively high for Asia, on average about 14 percent of the cost of land (for comparison, Singapore, China and Malaysia average about 5 percent, and the U.S. about 12.53%).35 According to Sirinivas, these taxes, levied on both buyers and sellers, create an “incentive on both sides to undermine the price in a bid to avoid the taxes, and pay the difference between actual and declared values in illegal margins.”36 In other words, bribery. With government graft and builders’ profit motives working in conjunction to create dangerous norms for low-income housing construction, in retrospect a disaster on the scale of the Mumba collapse seems almost inevitable.

Unfortuantely, not every bad idea in Indian affordable housing manifests as ludicious commentary. At the intersection of private-sector corner-cutting and government malfeasance, on April 5, a standard-sized, partially constructed apartment house in the Mumba neighborhood of Thane, a Mumbai suburb, collapsed, killing 74 people.; With profit margins narrow on houses intended for poor people, unethical builders have incentives to take illegal shortcuts during construction, in particular because the construction has made materials expensive37 and in part because investors recoup their sunk costs more quickly. And the Mumba collapse was exacerbated by an ill-conceived law that protects partially constructed buildings—illegal or not—from demolition; the unfinished building housed “mainly migrant workers who lived their families living on the lower floors and paying as little as 500 rupees a month in rent,” according to Aditi Shah.16

The problems of below-board housing construction aren’t limited to the very poorest, either; according to Chilkoti, “even housing finance companies (HFCs), which do have the infrastructure and know-how required to craft responsibility, can’t be relied upon” to evaluate the soundness and legality of new buildings before they are occupied.25

Though combining the worst in government oversight and private sector greed is disastrous, all public-private endeavors need not be so. In the near term, some public-private partnerships could even help municipalities bridge the gap between their resources and their responsibilities, at least according to some observers.26 Other positive efforts could include reforming India’s disorderly land deed system, a colonial relic which records only transactions for purposes of tax collection without keeping tabs on ownership, a practice that fails to provide “the statutory support of certainty to title.”27 Some reforms already undertaken include the implementation of the Micro Housing Finance Corporation, which provides easier access to loans than ever before, and External Commercial Borrowing, which allows foreign investment in public projects.28

Although Mayank cautions that “the key ideas of making affordable housing work through adequate amenities and appropriate location remain unaddressed,” financial reforms have allowed developers of affordable EWS and LIG houses to “leapfrog” to the outskirts of major cities where land is cheap and such buildings are feasible without corner-cutting. Although not necessarily close to core city employment, Daniel Rozas and Vikrash Kumar visited some of these far-flung developments and found that they provide a measure of comfort, “fresh air and open space” to poor people once confined to slums and who are proud to own their own homes, an important improvement for those who had previously been at the mercy of capricious landlords.29 Capricious developers can still be a problem, though— one dumped “a massive pile of construction debris” at the edge of a garden—“boobs full of nails sticking out” included—and never returned to clean it up. But despite the various reforms lauded by private sector boosters, some builders will continue to behave badly, and some others will produce undesirable outcomes regardless of their benign intentions. Properly managed, easier credit will be a boon, but public-private partnerships cannot replace the necessary oversight functions of a well-working government. Establishing a strong, minimally corrupt state is in the interest of all parties, and likely a more difficult undertaking than, say, lowering interest rates. Indians should take care to heed the lessons of the 2009 recession—in overhauling its broken housing system with western-style reforms, India should be wary of importing western-style abuses as well.

Street scene in New Delhi, India. Photo by Sam Chadiff

**Sheldon Baker is a Masters of Urban Planning Candidate at Hunter College. His focus is on transportation and he expects to graduate in the fall of 2014.**
Every year, urban planners, architects, and tactical urbanists transform car parking spaces into small creative parks for Parking Day. This year, Hunter GUAPA participated by converting a parking space on Lexington Avenue into a park to promote the urban planning and affairs program, engage the public, and demonstrate that temporary transformation of urban space is possible and fun.

This year’s project engaged the public with a photography guessing game. Five photos of public spaces around the world were chosen: Brooklyn Bridge Park, Millennium Park in Chicago, Gardens by the Bay in Singapore, MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, and Flamengo Park in Rio de Janeiro.

The game challenged participants to guess the name of a city from the photos of the parks to demonstrate the link between iconic public spaces and the international image of cities. For example, game participants quickly identified Anish Kapoor’s Cloud Gate sculpture by aLexander Schaefer of the United Nations building in Chicago, Gardens by the Bay in Singapore, MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, and Flamengo Park in Rio de Janeiro.

The game participants quickly identified the piece of art as a recognizable asset to the city. Can a city create value from that unique reputation as a creative city and a must-go tourist destination? Will the competition to create iconic, reputation-enhancing public spaces rival the global competition to build the world’s tallest skyscraper?

Alexander Schaefer is a student in the Master of Urban Planning program at Hunter College. His focus is on economic development and urban design. He expects to graduate in the spring of 2014.