

THIRD SPACES

Spring 2026 Issue



from Boston University Initiative on Cities

A LETTER FROM THE THIRD SPACES TEAM

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the Third Space!

The Third Spaces Zine explores how creativity shapes urban communities, celebrating arts and culture at the intersection of urbanism. This issue features photos, illustrations, and excerpts from our longer works, which can be found on our website. Scan the QR code at the end of the zine to continue reading!

Third spaces are the heart of the community. From parks and museums to coffee shops and bookstores, these places are vital to urban life.

But, slowly, third spaces are disappearing. In a digital society that has been increasingly isolated, it's important for us to seek mutual care and connectivity. Each of us holds a unique connection to the city, and we invite urbanists from all backgrounds to share their stories.

Our zine emerged out of a need for a student-centered, urban community. Together, we are artists, scholars, and civic leaders. Through creativity and collaboration, we shape the built environment around us. Our stories resonate in the streets, on sidewalks, and across rooftops.

Thank you for bringing this third space to life.

In community,

Sasa Ramos
Yige Qin
Caitlin Lee
Onjoli Palmer
Zoe Simonte
Angie Baicu

Third Spaces Zine

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PUBLIC KITCHENS: REIMAGINING THE THIRD SPACE THROUGH FOOD

In a quiet corner of Boston a group of neighbors chop onions around a stainless steel table. Someone stirs a pot of beans, seasoned the way their grandmother taught them. Two children run back and forth, giggling, carrying spoons that are just a bit too big for their hands. The air is thick with garlic, steam, cumbia music, and the subtle rhythm that emerges when folks collaborate on a common task. It is ordinary and remarkable at the same time. This scene did not unfold in a restaurant or someone’s home. It took place in a public kitchen. Communal kitchens are not

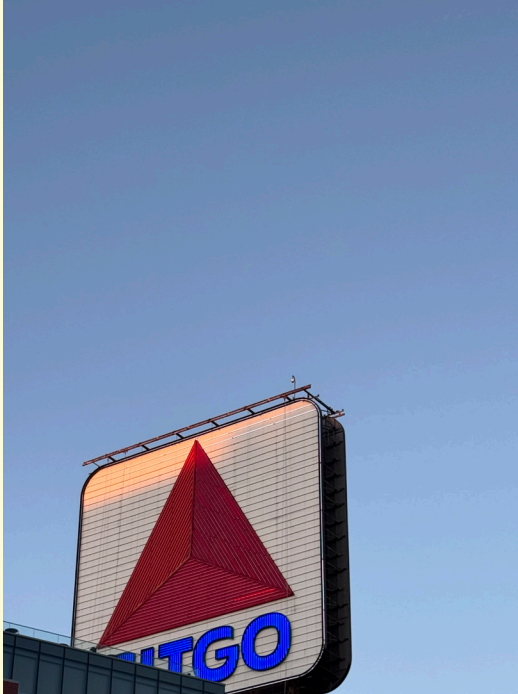
Andrea Catania
*Co-founder, EquiTable
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and gendered. Today, the absence of public cooking spaces is so normalized that the very idea of a public kitchen can seem unusual or be met with skepticism. Yet the need for communal spaces of nourishment has only grown. Many Americans lack access to a kitchen at home. Many others live in neighborhoods without safe public gathering places. Some are simply searching for community in some form or another. Food insecurity, social isolation, and cultural fragmentation (especially post-COVID) intersect in ways that reveal how deeply the food system shapes the civic landscape.



Photos by Zoe Simonte.

new to the world. For centuries, public food spaces have been cornerstones of social life across Latin America, West Africa, East Asia, the Middle East, and Indigenous communities throughout the globe. Even in the United States, communal cooking was once more common well into the 20th century in the form of boarding houses, settlements, cooperative kitchens. Long before that, shared hearths and community mills made up some of the food-based public infrastructure that served society. But the industrial revolution, the cult of the nuclear home, and the privatization of food spaces pushed cooking behind closed doors. U.S. cities reorganized around private property and single-family domesticity and the kitchen shifted from a shared civic asset to a room tucked behind walls, increasingly isolated



The modern solitary confinement

Nikhil Pol
Political Science and Economics, CAS '27

Other people are an inevitability.

Our chronology as a species is built upon a foundation of communal engagement, care and communication.

However, a purely evolutionary explanation precludes us from getting to the core of this argument.

Our sociability is a characteristic that does more than just ensure that we live, for it determines how much we have lived. At the end of the day, we choose to come in contact with other people.

The modern world is extremely concerned with optimizing the private sphere, ensuring that entire lives can rise and set within the narrow barriers of our own individuality.

In America, cities once revered for their public transportation adopt car centric infrastructure for optimum urban efficiency.

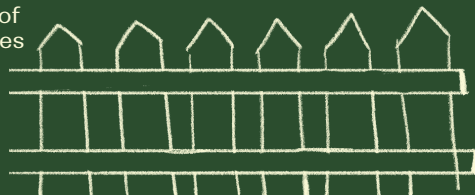
It would not suffice to simply chalk up these phenomena to the will of external forces like zoning policies and the tapering urban sprawl.

There is a potent spirit of separation ingrained into many of the choices that we make on a daily basis, in the preferences that we actively embrace.

Such is the complete diagnosis of the modern disease of individualism.

This explanation is consistent with why the Western world and, more specifically, the United States are especially infectious to third spaces. Being around other people involves compromise. It involves resigning personal choice to, at least, a point where a space satisfies more than a single set of preferences.

Life is indeed made easier each time an amenity is placed closer to our reach. But what are we even left with in this box? When the day comes that we are able to centralize all required effort to our own private spheres, what will we even live for?



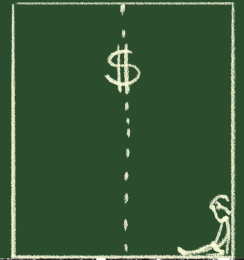
Our present relationship with physical space is one such phenomenon that is eerily disconnected from the natural world.

As such, there was an intensely autonomous relationship between us and the space around us — if we were willing and able, we could come to occupy any space that we wished.

However, this principle has been eroded in an era where people's physical horizons are inextricably tied to their financial status. It is a transparent fact of modern life that having more money is synonymous with being able to move about more freely. When understood in this manner, space is a reward to be earned rather than a fundamental feature of reality to be inherited by everyone.

The separation between different kinds of spaces,

Third Spaces Zine



the total area we are permitted to move about in and even the amount that our arms can stretch in our immediate vicinity are all a function of how much we can afford.

While we may have been born with no spatial restrictions in the state of nature, in the modern world, we are born into congestion. If we want to move about a little more freely, it is up to us to earn our way upward into an echelon where we have the privilege of not suffocating.

Our predicament is no different from the "fleas in a jar" experiment, where fleas were kept in a closed glass jar for days on end. Even when the lid was opened, they learned to only move about within the limits of the jar. Regardless of how they were born to operate and the unbarred access they now enjoy, the lid allowed us to change their very nature.

Photos by Kai Davis.

ANIMALS OF



THE CITY

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Third Spaces Zine

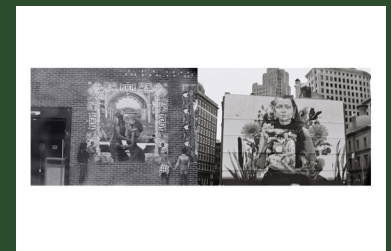
Ting Wei Li
City Planning,
MET '27 (CAS '22)

Yige Qin
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A New Beginning. 5x7 in, digital art.



An Analysis of Transit-Induced Gentrification Along Boston's Orange and Green Lines

close the final gap in Boston's transit network by extending the Blue Line nearly half a mile below Cambridge Street to a newly constructed platform at Charles/MGH. As a result, riders would no longer need to make two transfers via the Green and Orange Lines. Though a considerably small extension, the project is slated to have regional impact. It is expected to improve access between transit-dependent communities in East Boston and Revere and major employment hubs in Cambridge. As a result, this would decrease congestion in overcrowded stations while also improving accessibility for riders by reducing travel time. While the Red-Blue Connector is relatively modest in scale, it has the potential to lead to the same uneven socioeconomic dynamics observed after the Orange Line and GLX expansions. In both



Photos courtesy of Zoe Simonte (top and bottom) and Kai Davis (middle).

cases, incomes and rents tended to rise near new stations but not in a uniform fashion. Rather, changes reflected development pressures that were shaped by each neighborhood's existing stock and demographics. Applying these patterns to the Red-Blue Connector could mean that improved access between East Boston, Revere and Cambridge may similarly increase demand and rent near stations. Therefore, prior MBTA expansions reveal the Connector may generate complex, neighborhood specific changes rather than a clear pattern of gentrification.

Public transit investments have the potential to shape the social and economic environments of global cities. The rerouting of Boston's Orange Line light rail system in the late 1980s and the expansion of its Green Line in 2022 illustrate the dual effects of transit infrastructure: mass transit can bridge neighborhoods and increase interregional mobility, but it can also displace residents, exacerbate housing inequality, and change the face of the communities it serves. This report explores whether these transit projects have contributed to transit-induced gentrification in Greater Boston.

Alexandra Angelini, Halle-Marie Armstrong, Angelina Baicu, Brady Conner, Mara Crockett, Weiqi Ding, Monica Fumagalli, Micaela Henry, Massimo Marano, Bobby Sue Villani, Yihang Lex Xu, Ning Zhang

racial composition, and income suggest that new transit investments can aid and accelerate gentrification and displacement. However, evidence suggests not a uniform displacement pressure or socioeconomic uplift of surrounding neighborhoods, but rather a series of varied and uneven effects. Historical differences between the communities served by the Orange and Green lines, as well as the scale of implementing transit infrastructure changes, likely contribute to differences in the findings.

For more than a century, the MBTA has considered connecting the Red and Blue Line to alleviate chronic congestion at Park Street and Government Center, and concrete planning efforts suggest these ambitions may finally materialize. The Red-Blue Connector would

This work combines historical investigation, geospatial analysis, and qualitative insights to examine the effects of the 1987 Orange Line rerouting and the 2022 Green Line Extension (GLX) on local communities.

In whole, the results from the Orange Line rerouting in the late 1980s and the GLX in the late 2010s suggest a nuanced, transit-induced gentrification pressure on the surrounding tracts. Shifts in rent,



Kai Davis
Photography,
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Reimagining Boston: How Zoning Reform Could Become Boston's Most Significant Tool to Fix Its Housing Crisis

Eric Hsu
Political Science and Sociology, CAS '27

Zoning policy allows local policymakers to object to housing developments that could have spillover impacts on surrounding neighborhoods, such as the construction of a sewage treatment plant near a residential neighborhood. Theoretically, a development process involves input from community stakeholders, allowing the general public to raise questions about the impact of new housing developments. This provides vulnerable communities with an avenue to push back against projects that could have negative ramifications, such as urban renewal and highways. However, excessively restrictive

zoning policies could backfire by exacerbating the housing affordability crisis. They slow the development of new housing, resulting in fewer units being built. This creates a negative chain of reactions: people chase fewer homes, which drives up prices for the few remaining. Stringent zoning rules force housing developers to follow a lengthy, tedious process to comply with regulations, which adds uncertainty and extra costs that are reflected in the final price. As an antidote, zoning reform is a critical element in addressing housing affordability in Boston and

other major metropolitan areas. While zoning reform would not offer an immediate fix to the housing affordability crisis in Boston, making housing easier to build while also taking into account inclusionary zoning principles and financial incentives for policy stakeholders would go a long way in addressing the root problem, a lack of housing units on the market in the first place.

On September 13, 2023, Mayor Wu announced a plan to drastically overhaul the city's enormously complex zoning code for the first time in nearly 60 years, based on a city-commissioned report by Cornell University professor Sarah Bronin. Hopefully, the plan will serve as a catalyst for policymakers and other stakeholders to take bolder, more decisive action on this front.



Laura Zhang
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On Desire

BALIKBAYAN ("HOMECOMING")

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Born and raised in San Francisco, I watched my neighborhood's characteristic stucco homes gradually fade into sleek, wood-paneled structures, which catalyzed my pursuit of housing justice. My intersectional leadership shines as a mosaic of my lived experiences, priming me for a visionary career as a sociology professor. Moving across the country to attend a private research university was once an unspoken dream clouded by my own struggle with housing insecurity. I hold onto the memory of my father resting his calloused hands on the steering wheel, patiently waiting for my mother to finish her ten-hour shift; my bright eyes met his amusement in the rearview mirror as I read aloud new words to enrich his English vocabulary.

My innate curiosity has taken me places beyond my imagination, from Boston's snowy rooftops to Berlin's boundless horizons. Empowered by a full-tuition scholarship, I have taken countless opportunities to challenge myself intellectually, leveraging social capital in the absence of material wealth. Yet, this "one-way ticket out of poverty" has not deterred me from celebrating where I come from. Taking ownership of my narrative, I turn poison into medicine. Breaking the cycle of generational poverty, I return to my urban village not only as a first-generation college graduate but also as an emerging scholar-activist. Only now, after



pursuing higher education in a faraway place, have I discovered my true calling: pouring gifts into my community until it overflows with opportunity. The strength to carry ancestral wisdom, healing colonial wounds. The audacity to speak the unspeakable, giving agency to the most vulnerable. The courage to dream of another world—abundant with radical joy. Across the city skyline, I announce my homecoming.



Photos by Sofia Valli



The Power of Suggestion

Nikhil Pol

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We use judgment to make sense of the world. Given that there are a variety of things in the world that need to be made sense of, the corresponding judgments we have at our disposal come in all shapes and sizes — and not all judgments are made equal. Of these, those produced in the court of public opinion occupy a significantly lower rung in the hierarchy of normative judgments than, say, their sophisticated counterparts in the legal arena. Regardless of the moral correctness of the parties involved, it is a fact that each legal judgment is reached only after extensive deliberation, owing to the judicial branch's strict adherence to procedure, accuracy and universal access of representation and defense.

The court of public opinion, on the other hand, is fundamentally untameable. With no arbiter to answer to and no strictly defined scope of facts to limit either side's arguments, the tribunal of public opinion is a guerrilla courthouse, regulated by neither burden of proof nor formal procedure. It also exists on a much broader scale and may even be more accurately termed the "social court," given how the interactive means of collective consensus are an essential part of producing any judgment in the public sphere. Despite this disparity between legal and social courts, the latter

possess tacit advantages in terms of the power their judgments hold. This is because the social sphere is a fertile breeding ground for one of the most potent influences of collective perception and attitude: conspiracy theories.

All conspiracy theories require in order to have the same effect as long-standing legal rulings is to blemish a core argument with a set of loosely strung facts that are attractive and internally coherent enough to incept an idea — the possibility that certain events transpired in a specific way. This is not unlike the "beyond-reasonable-doubt" clause invoked to juries in the courtroom, where the defense, in order to effectively counter the prosecution, has to only present a plausible alternative to the established claim.

Eventually these ideas take root in half-formed, ephemeral and sticky frames of reference that all individuals inescapably resort to when they lack the capacity to come to a conclusion through wholly critical means. Thus, despite enforcing a formidable universal standard within a citizenry, judicial rulings do not come close to being as unamendable and cemented as social rulings of facts to limit either side's arguments, the tribunal of public opinion is a guerrilla courthouse, regulated by neither burden of proof nor formal procedure.

All generations of the past have found themselves as belligerents in a conflict of the body, heart, and mind between the circumstances that they are born into and the circumstances constructed for them by the systems that govern. Our present era captures an especially momentous battle given the sheer number of individuals and groups that the system has managed to antagonize. It is a battle fought on the frontlines — in those instances at rallies, protests, and riots when the ground forces on either side are explicitly aware of the nature and intensity of the conflict. However, to the committed soldier, to the ones who are able and willing enough to see the extent of the systemic injustices that we are victims of, it is also a battle fought in offices, factory floors, classrooms and homes — in moments that retain passive intensity and, yet, significant weight. As such, it is a battle with no respite, a battle with no designated battlefield, and, often, a battle fought against an undefined yet powerful enemy. It is a battle that requires us to stand at attention under a persistently scorching sun and take arms against a sea of troubles that

give no sign of an end, no matter how much we oppose them.

It is a serious battle moulded by the seriousness required by all the countless despairs, horrors and moral failings of our era. However, it is in the very recognition of the gravity of this battle that we must learn to, from time to time, allow ourselves to be unserious. Allow ourselves to be disarmed. Allow ourselves to take an off-day. Such was the exact attitude of the American gay liberation movement of the 70s and 80s — the queer activists found themselves fighting a system that refused to recognize an AIDS epidemic that was killing them by the hundred thousands.

And despite this, they were some of the most fun individuals to be around. The itinerary of liberation, in the eternal words of Dan Savage, involved "burying friends in the morning, protesting in the afternoon and dancing all night." The toll that any soldier consents to pay is the constancy of battle.

Nikhil Pol

Political Science and Economics, CAS '27

The Dance of Liberation

COUPLE



AT

PLAY

Photos by Ronice Kimbrel

The Rising Tide of Gun Lobby Influence: Benitez's Ruling and the **Second Amendment**

Nikhil Pol
Political Science and Economics, CAS '27

The argument that background checks go diametrically against the United States Constitution's Second Amendment is one that is cited in rulings by conservative judges, such as Benitez, who intend to keep the promise of "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Owing to their limited specifications, such constitutionally binding rulings and laws are often interpreted differently in different cases resulting in inconsistent outcomes in cases that cite them.

One of the most controversial clauses from the original U.S. The Constitution has been the Second Amendment: a 27 word clause which has been used as a legal tool to design multiple state and national level bills relating to ammunition and firearm ownership. According to the Former Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, Warren Burger, "the need for a State militia was the predicate of the "right" guarantee, so as to protect the security of the State.



Today, of course, the State militia serves a different purpose." The evolution of the significance and purpose of the Second Amendment exhibits a much clearer chronicle of the ways in which modern rulings are the victim of an improper interpretation of this Constitutional clause.

The Easter Walk

Katherine Guo
Mathematics, CAS '27

Lucas was visiting somewhere with even more cherry blossoms, with the winds carrying even more secrets of nature: a crystallized ideal of spring, polished by the master poets of old and handed down through reams of history. Meanwhile, I frisked between the equally-ancient heavens and earth, watching the saga of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl (insert). Now, the genesis of the Milky Way as a gash torn through the skies with a flick of the enraged Queen Mother's hairpin sets a much more dramatic backdrop to the night view whenever I look up at the stars.

It was certainly quite dramatic then: the cold lights glimmering in the darkness of the story's setting placed in total juxtaposition with the cheery spring day that was my world. At some point, it started getting chilly, and we could ignore the outer world no longer. Back in the present, we gathered our thoughts and books and returned down Commonwealth Avenue. There was still a whole other side of the street we hadn't explored.

I pointed out that since Commonwealth Avenue runs approximately west to east, the trees on the northern side got more sun, and so seemed to bloom bigger and have greener leaves than the one on the south side; Lucas pointed out that that only made the trees on the south side grow and reach taller for the sunlight. Maybe there's a metaphor for something in there, but at that moment I had suddenly become hooked on the aspects of urban design, rambling about how much more sun a north-south main street would admit.

Photo by Logen Zimmerman



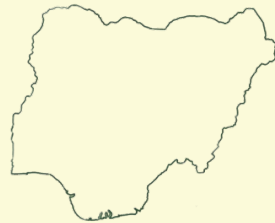
HEALTHCARE DISPARITIES IN NIGERIA

Matt Lutkins

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Across the world, healthcare remains one of the most pressing challenges faced by countries, whether developed, such as the United States, or developing, such as Nigeria. A country's healthcare system reflects its institutional capacity, social priorities, and commitment to the well-being of its citizens. With regard to healthcare, Nigeria presents a particularly compelling case. As of 2025, Nigeria is ranked 187th out of 191 countries in the World Health Organization's health system performance rankings (Yisa et al., 2025). This incredibly low ranking illuminates the structural weaknesses in the country's healthcare access and inclusion. Building on this context and intrigue, my project examines the spatial distribution of healthcare facilities, particularly hospitals, across Nigeria's 36 states.

The goal of my research project is to situate healthcare infrastructure within broader social, economic, and political dynamics that are currently shaping the country. More specifically, I investigate factors such as the clustering of different healthcare facilities, the impacts of COVID-19, geopolitical conflicts in the northeast, religious density, electricity infrastructure, community distance to healthcare services, and socioeconomic inequality. I synthesize these variables together into a set of indices that compare Nigeria's supply of healthcare (accessibility) with the population's demand for healthcare (vulnerability and need).



These indices make it easier to standardize, compare, and visualize overarching accessibility and vulnerability trends across states and regions in Nigeria. Africa represents a uniquely important region for development research due to its demographic diversity and persistent structural challenges, with Nigeria standing out as one of the fastest-growing countries in the world. As Nigeria continues to urbanize, socially integrate into the rest of the world, and expand economically, it is critical to understand how healthcare systems evolve, who they serve, and how they can be improved in order to achieve sustainable development.

KEEP OR TOSS? – AFRICAN AMERICAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN INCARCERATION VS. DEPORTATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Third Spaces Zine

Jessica Wu

Psychology and Sociology, CAS '27

Historically, classifications of race or color have appeared and disappeared on the census based on the political significance of the group at that time. Ultimately, the only category that remained the same was "White" while other ethnic classifications merged into large pan-ethnic race categories. Most recently, the creation of the "Asian and Pacific Islander (API)" category on the census condensed a massive group of vastly different cultures and ethnicities spanning hundreds of countries into one homogenous term, "Asian". By creating this umbrella term, the stereotypes that traditionally marked people of Chinese or Japanese descent seeped into and eventually became the "American understanding" of Asians.

Therefore, because American society recognizes Asian Americans as an outstanding example of assimilating to American culture, negative stereotypes like incarceration do not seem to concern Asian Americans. On the other hand, deportation is a potential reality attached to all people of color in the United States. In fact, before Trump's new executive orders to create an even stricter travel ban on immigrants which in turn will lead to increased orders for deportation, the Department of Homeland Security threatened over 15,000 Southeast Asian refugees from 2021 to 2022 that they would face deportation due to past criminal records.



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Mara Crockett	Katherine Guo
Weiqi Ding	Logen Zimmerman
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THIRD SPACES

