

# Equity in the Design of Public Space



Lynne C. Manzo, PhD - Environmental Psychologist  
Dept. of Landscape Architecture, College of Built Environments  
University of Washington



# What Environmental Psychology can offer Design & Planning?

- **Conceptual Frameworks**
  - Ways of thinking about people-place interactions
  - Language regarding values + principles about “good” design
- **Body of Research Evidence**
  - 60+ yrs of research
  - Beware environmental determinism! BUT: env’tal probablism
  - Importance of context specific solutions
- **Critical Lens**
  - Challenging implicit assumptions

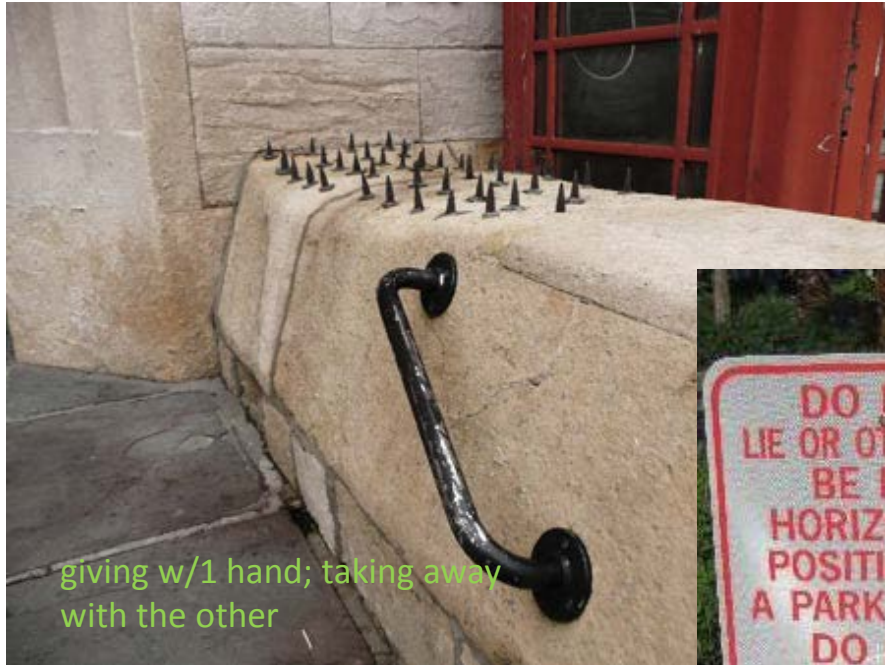


*“It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished.”*

William “Holly” Whyte



# Architecture of Control







# Design & Management Strategies that diminish the public realm

- Commercialization – the right to be in space is secured by payment and consumption
- Restrictive Policies – based on fear of the “other” they are inhospitable to most
- Privatization – ownership & management w/ private entities, fosters lack of generosity toward the public

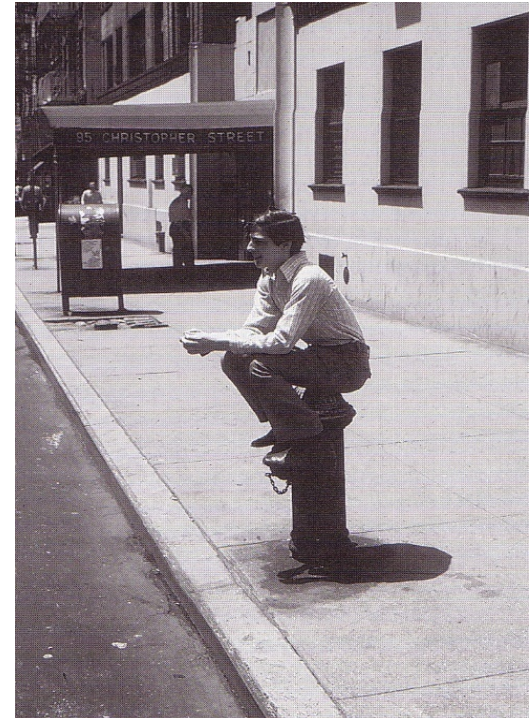






# Improvisation

making something out  
of nothing





“Bench object” by Matthew Hinckman



Sarah Ross’s “Archisuits”



Sean Godsell’s “House in a Park”

# The Value of Public Space

## public space = public life

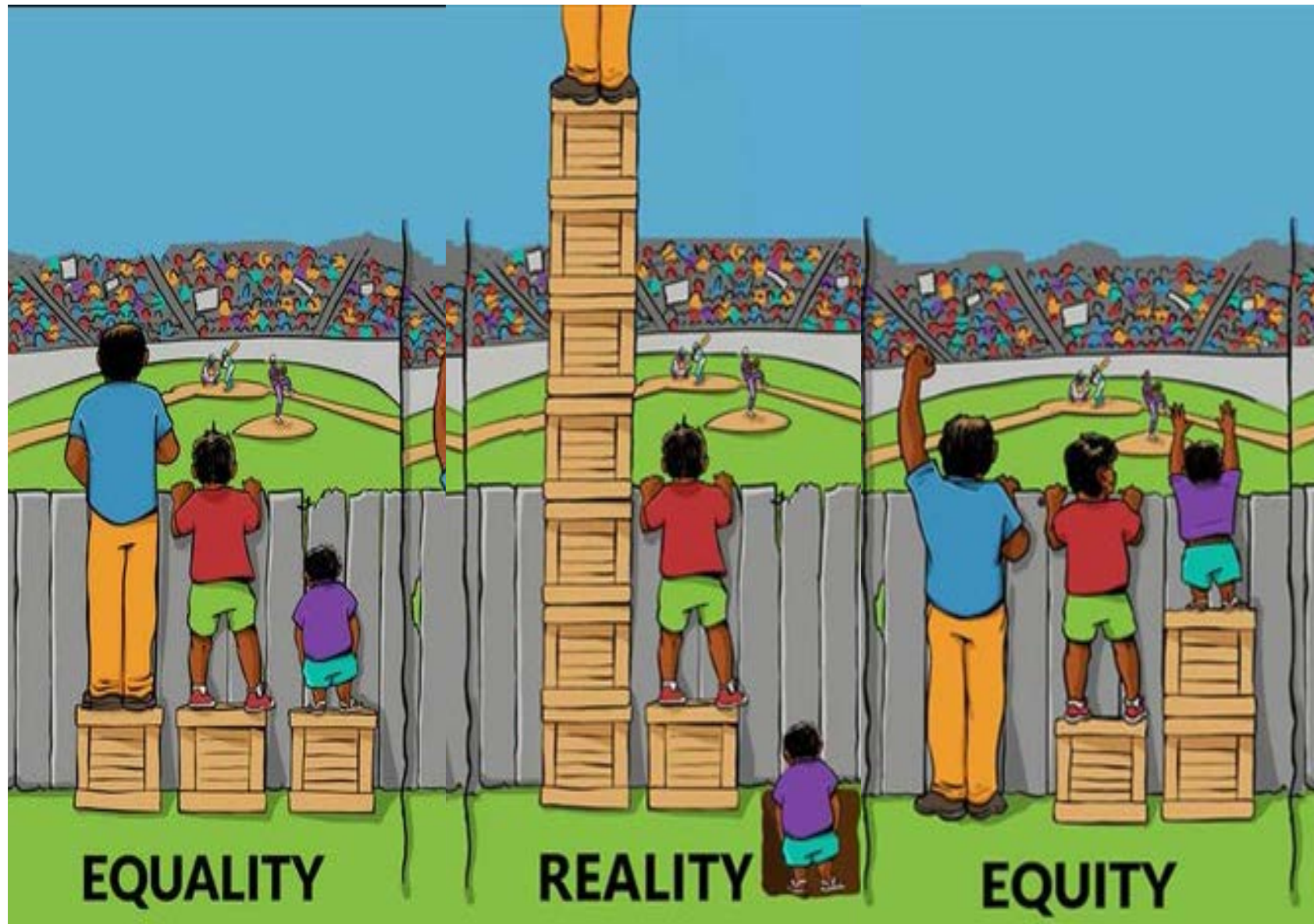
- The stage upon which communal life unfolds
- Provides opportunities for human exchange
  - by design or default
- A place to perform identities
- Conveys cultural meanings + values
- Fosters a sense of belonging to a larger whole
- Potential to build (or diminish) community
  - To enrich or diminish daily life
- Essential to democracy, to exercising rights + freedoms



# Rapid and Dramatic Change

- Demographers project that the U.S. will be majority of people of color in 25 years
- Eric Lui: “We are experiencing a deep tectonic shift; whiteness and Americanness are decoupling”
- This demographic revolution is creating simultaneous surges of hopefulness and anxiety
- Compassionate + inclusive policies and design approaches are needed





## Where is Generous Urbanism?



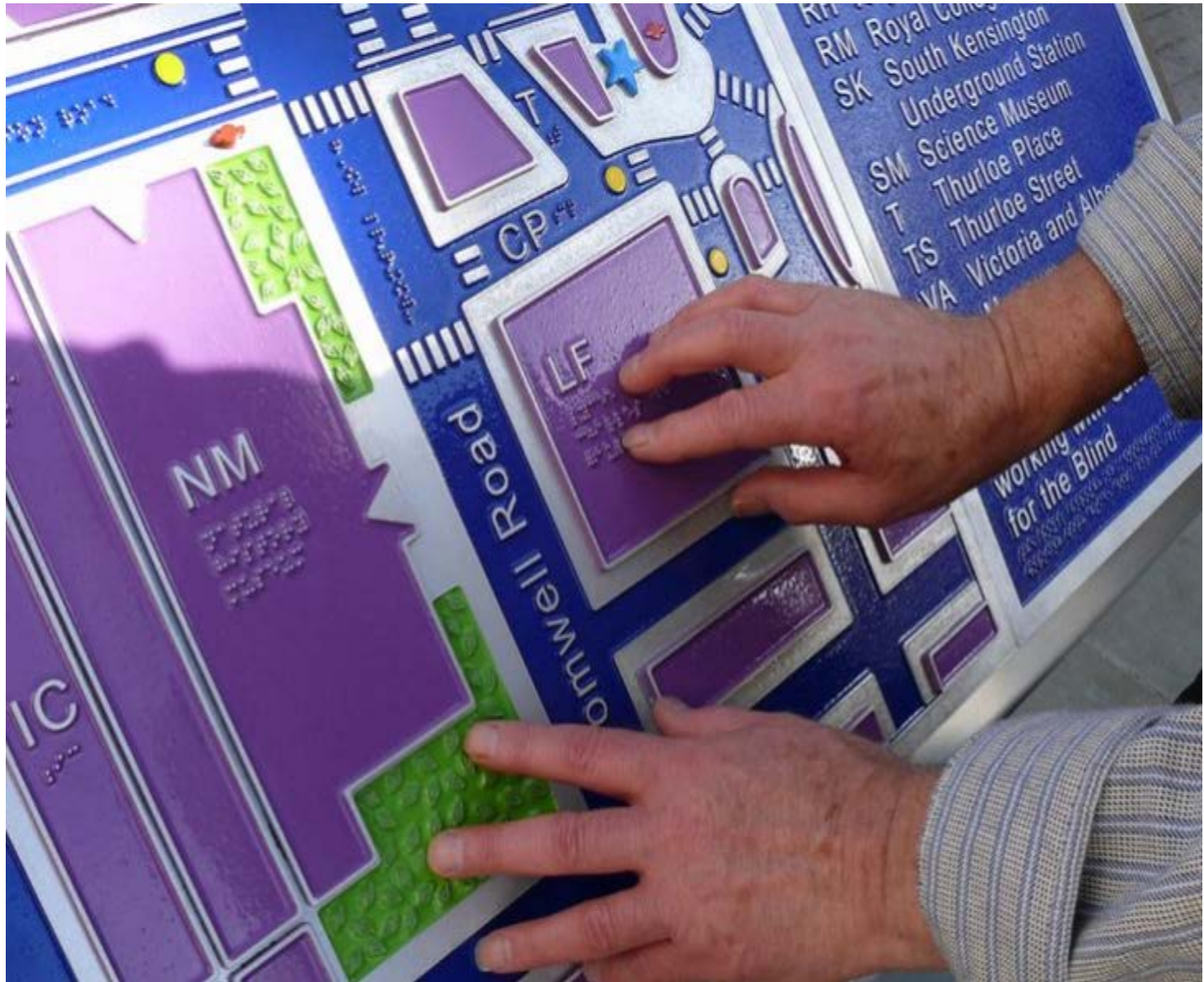


“I don't think words can explain how I felt when I went to the beach today and saw my son, Peyton, riding down that mat. His smile and excitement cannot be described. Thank you, thank you, thank you, so, so much. We were supposed to leave for vacation today but delayed it a day just so he could have fun on the beach.”







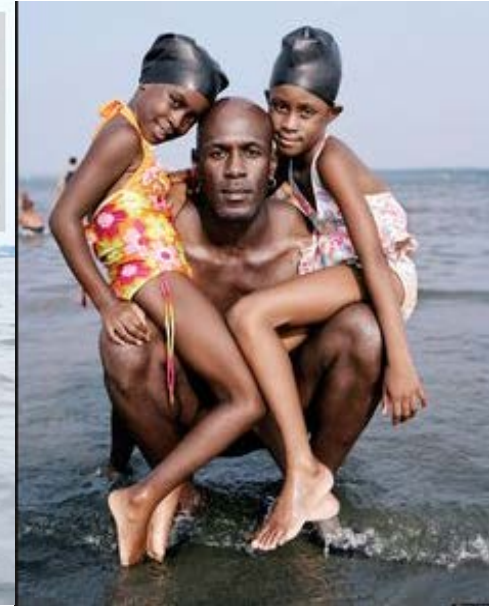


# Cultural Expressions & Uses

multiple publics create their niche / peaceful co-existence



**THE BRONX RIVIERA**  
Images // Wayne Lawrence



# What is Cultural Diversity Good for?

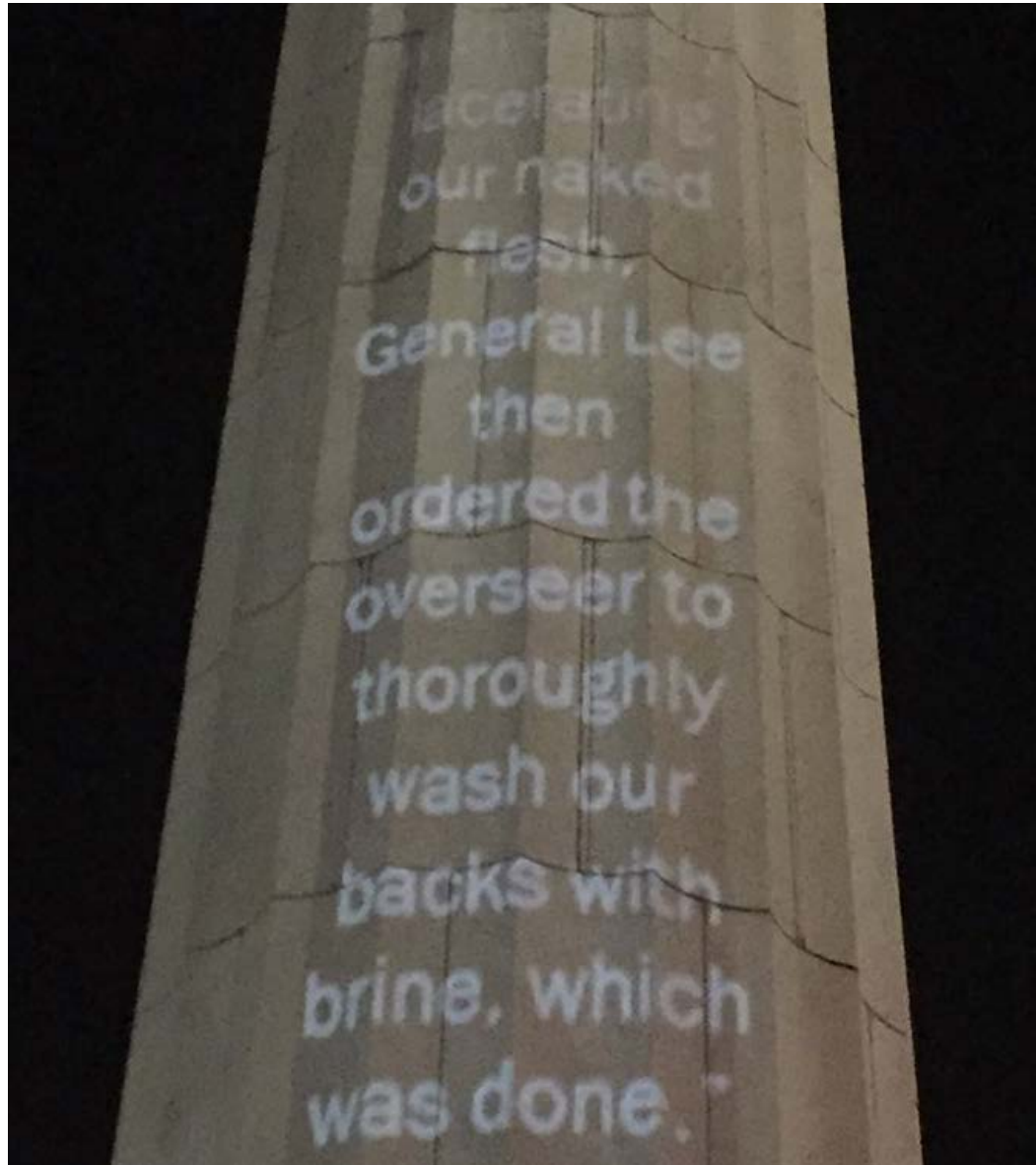
- Everyone has a moral right to their cultural identity + heritage
- There is an ecological advantage to embracing different orientations and adaptations to environmental resources
- It offers opportunities for cultural resistance to domination and is a way to counteract relations of dependency
- Confrontations between cultures can generate new understandings and cultural processes
- Offers a broader aesthetic sense and source of creativity

# Interrogating Comfort an equity approach

- “Community” is an appealing alternative to public life. It promises to provide the pleasures of sociability without the **discomforts** of the unfamiliar.
- Should we privilege **comfort** over the work of democracy and social justice? Is discomfort a more serious harm than injustice?



# Public Art that Disrupts Everyday “Comfort”



## Take 'em Down NOLA

Black-led coalition to  
remove monuments that  
commemorate racist figures

Protest Art at  
Robert E. Lee Statue

Photo by Bryan Lee

# Two Emerging Issues

Cultural Co-optation



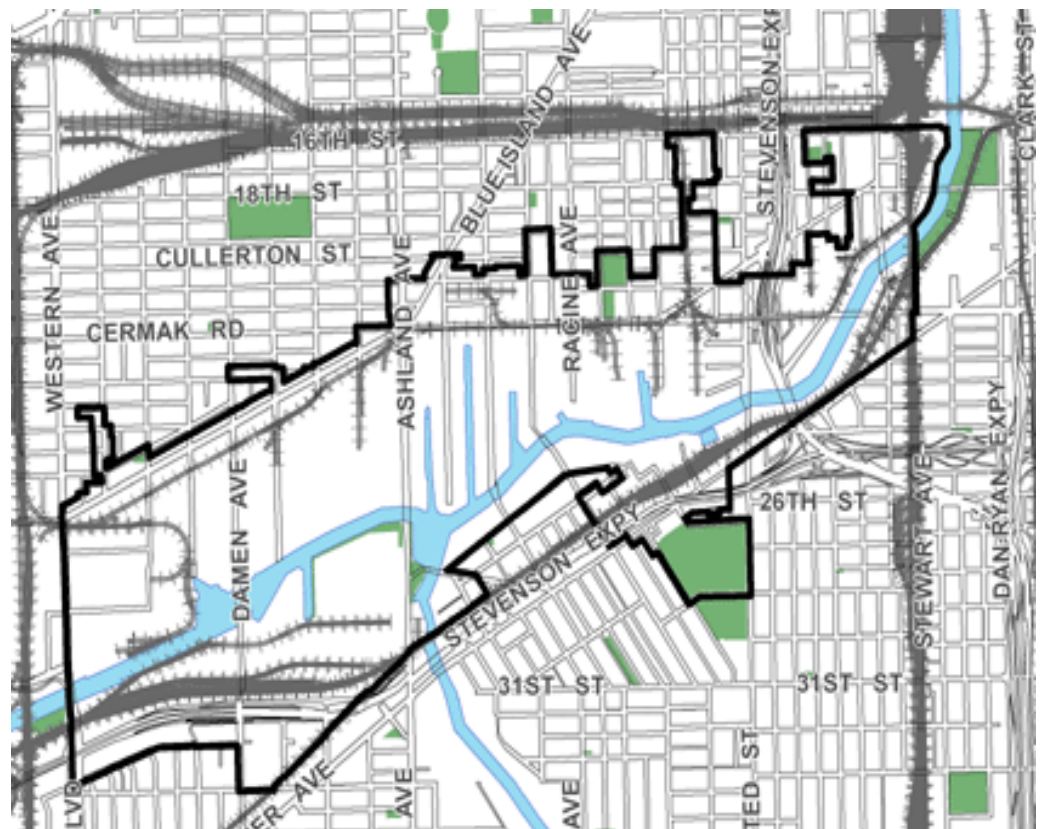
Ecological Gentrification



# Including or Co-opting Culture?

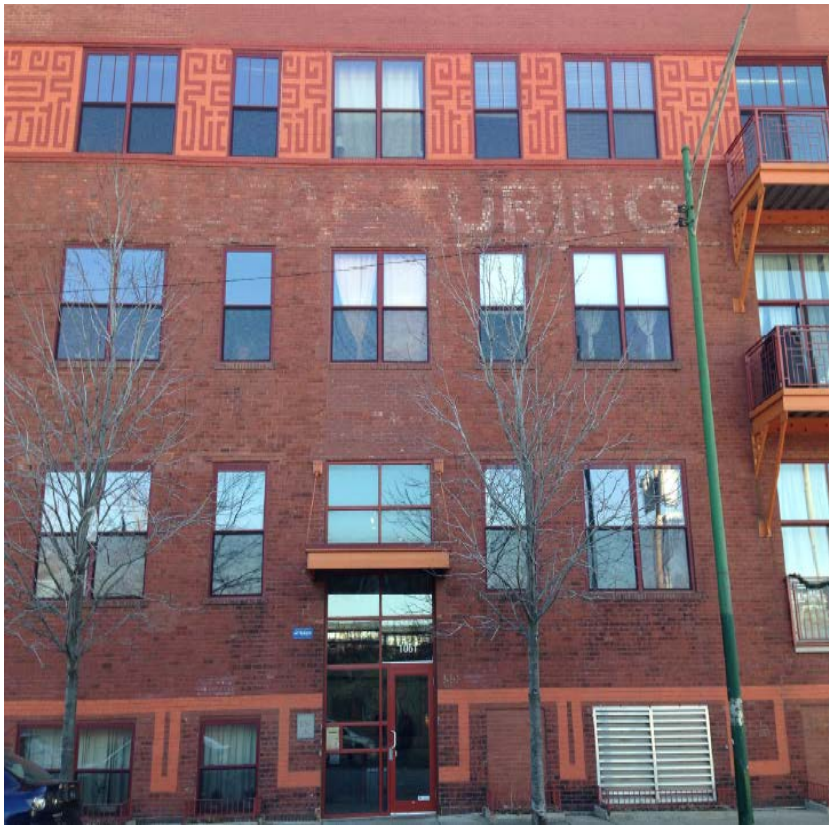
Pilsen, Chicago











# Ecological Gentrification

Are landscape architects “accidental” gentrifiers?

***“The implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to public green spaces that leads to the displacement or exclusion of the most economically vulnerable human population ... while espousing an environmental ethic.”***

- How can social and ecological values be in greater alignment?
- Is nature privileged over impacts of vulnerable people?
- How can green infrastructure project be inclusive & not displace people?
- What happens when we “rescue” marginalized spaces?

We need a **robust pluralism** in our approach to public green spaces - any ecological agenda must include the social

# “the right to the city”

Henri LeFebvre

*“The right to claim presence in the city; to wrest the use of the city from privileged new masters and democratize its spaces.”*

Check our criteria:

- Is **order** privileged over rights in public space?
- What would public space look like if we privileged **equity** & **justice**?
- Remember Olmstedian notion of urban spaces as places of **democratization**