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Arch 321
Final Essay

As a Computer Engineer, my coursework never really takes me away from my computer, let alone outside, so I don't appreciate the influence of architecture all that much. Architecture 321, however, has revealed to me how important a role architecture has in the world, and transformed it from some far-off, vague concept to a more human system, made of individual people just trying to do the best they can. I had never truly considered the role transportation had in the development of cities, with concepts like a walking city completely foreign to me. I also learned an enormous amount about the connection between racism and architecture, and how much of that connection remains today.

Before this class, I understood that transportation methods were a medium for change. What I didn't understand is how strongly they drove change, from canals to railroads to cars and onward. Here I was taught the true importance of water in early settlement foundation and city expansion. With boats as the primary method of transportation, building cities and roadways perpendicular to the waterways for launching and loading shipments was such an obvious progression that I was surprised it took me this long to find out. The importance and augmentation of natural harbors like New York or Boston compounded on this new knowledge, allowing me to truly appreciate the marvel that is New York.

As the class continued, the concept of a 'Walking City' emerged. I had always thought of cities as some vaguely large conglomeration of buildings with straight lines for cars to drive on but had given little thought to pedestrians walking long distances. The concept of a walking city revealed microstructures in the formation of buildings, where people walked from home to work, and I noticed these patterns elsewhere, beginning to understand their importance. I had grown up in a society centered around automobiles, but walking never goes away, and I now see the smaller hubs that link together to build the larger city scape, miniature walking cities as a part of a larger whole.

A continuation of the topic, the effect of railroads during the era of the civil war, was something I had studied during high school, so I had at least some background knowledge during this section of the class. However, I had never had the development of halfway towns explained so clearly to me before, and the clarity this class's content brought to that topic helped firmly tie together the sections of development of early America in my mind. Relatively soon after the development of railways, the rise of the automobile spurred one of the most significant changes to city infrastructure, a large improvement over horse drawn busses and hard to maneuver railway lines. It was interesting to see the well documented rise of the suburbs, as people living in the cities in order to work in the cities moved outward to suburbs with the help of the automobile, with places like Detroit being hit the hardest population wise. This helped put some of my parent's generation's decisions into perspective and explained the inception and development of the place where I live.

Aside from just covering the effects of transportation on city development, this class shed light on a more current issue as well: institutional racism. Being alive in the 21st century, I understand a large amount about the topic of the current state of racism and its effects on the general population, and a large amount of schooling dedicated to studying early racism with slavery up to the civil war ensured I understood the beginning of the story as well. What I was missing was the link between the two, and with it the understanding of how the racism just after slavery has evolved to the racism present today. This class showed me just how deeply the roots intertwined with city development, and how concepts like gentrification actually worked.

In early city development, the allowance of open discrimination pushed minorities to the most undesirable, rundown areas of the city, beginning the system that has still not been truly removed today. In earlier times, something like a comprehensive education and a higher paying job would mean almost nothing for the situation of a black person, with housing constraints strictly forbidding them from improving their housing situation without extremely extensive work and research. This was compounded

by redlining, further damning the more impoverished regions within a city that were generally inhabited by minorities.

Further into the future, laws like the fair housing act forbid discrimination against minorities or otherwise, legally removing the policies that shackled minorities to impoverished areas. The battle was not over, however, with lack of education and a lower average income presenting hurdles for a minority to pass over before acquiring equivalent housing to a white person. This is only exacerbated by racial bias when allowing housing, whether subconscious or not. This can be clearly seen with concepts like gentrification, and with the racial divide in places like suburbs. For example, my own suburb is almost completely white, with only a couple minority families in the area at all. There are no policies enforcing this, but unequal opportunity and community pressure make it hard for minorities to live in these areas.

As this class comes to a close, I can say with complete certainty that it has changed the way I view the world. Its lessons on progress and development as a society, as well as the institutional racism that pervades our culture, will assuredly be explored further as I continue forward in life. With these exposed variables, I will understand the world around me more completely, and expect to build more comprehensive solutions to the problems I face. I hope what I learned in this class will help me to uncover more about the state of the world today and give vision to what it may look like in the future.