

Advancing planning theory and practice through embodiment, art, and collective expression to confront white nationalism

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Abstract

Every ingredient for the United States to fall into an authoritarian regime is present. Horrors are already unfolding in mass that manifest in the separation of children from parents, infants from mothers, the deportation of parents to countries they've never been, and violence on every level (political, economic, cultural, environmental, etc.) — including physical abuse and murder. As it currently stands, the United States stands on a knife's edge from full-blown use of concentration camps for immigrants and people of color. This article is partially historical in its efforts to display and elucidate how the Trump Administration's peddling of white nationalism is historical, generational, and a replication of white violence as seen many times nationally. Further, this article is the deliberative argumentation for embodied art and methods to democratize urban planning, advance progressive planning theory, support collective expression and resistance, and to confront racialized hatred. This work uses archival photos and histories of my own ancestral legacies as an Ashkenazi Jew that stand as a grounding narrative of what is at stake; and a narrative that provides intensified intimacy to support the progression of embodied methodologies in confronting white nationalism, advancing planning praxes through art and collective expression, and lastly the needed democratization of urban planning.

Key Words

White Supremacy, Inclusion, Embodiment, Planning Theory and Practice

Introduction

Following the 2024 U.S. presidential election cycle, immigrants, people of color, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community have come under attack, while educators and researchers are being accused of indoctrinating students when teaching and writing on systemic racism, slavery, gender inequality, white supremacy, and the corrective applications of diversity, equity, and inclusion in society (Mehra, 2025). Lifelong scholars are being targeted as suspected political agents infringing upon the white conscience of American citizens (Stockemer & Barbieri-Antonoglou, 2026). In such dangerous times, urban and regional planning in America has a responsibility — particularly in light of events over recent years — to the education on, preservation of, and continued furtherance towards its own democratization, and the dissolution of technocratic and hierarchical boundaries (Savini & Raco, 2019). The democratization of urban and regional planning has been a growing, but never consistent, part of the field's pedagogical practices for the last 60 years (Michener, 2023; Varwell, 2022). However, right now, progressive praxes of urban and regional planning that have historically sought to push back and interrupt structures of injustice, disenfranchisement, and inequality are in danger of being suppressed on a

generational scale. Worse, urban and regional planning praxes are being subsumed into authoritarian movements (Stockemer & Barbieri-Antonoglou, 2026).

Urban and regional planning, despite some of its own humanist advancements, has historically been used to—and continues to—displace neighborhoods of color, segregate immigrants, build gender inequality into public spaces, and much more (Wu & Lu, 2022; Goetz et al., 2020; Angotti et al., 2023). Planning has historically been, and continues to a large degree to be, the instrumentation and implementation of massive capitalist and materialist forces via rational comprehensive planning (Scott, 2020; Harvey, 2007). Urban planning is the bureaucratic arm that makes capitalist structures manifest in both rural and urban geographies (Alami & Dixon, 2023). Urban and regional planning gives organization and structure to power via spatial and rational planning, and the dominant culture determines its form and who benefits when democratic processes are deliberately excluded (Silver, 1991; Lee & Arroyo, 2023) (e.g., suburbia, segregation, urban renewal, gentrification, environmental injustice). Fundamentally, urban and regional planning is as much a human behavior as it is a technical practice. This duality must be dissolved, because like human behavior, planning has the power to destroy, maim, injure, erase, and divide, but it also has the power to construct, build, organize, create, protect, and even heal.

America is moving from neoliberalism and representative democracy to fascism. This backward slide, decay, and concentration of hatred towards the marginalized of society has been culminating for decades. For roughly the last 50 years, the United States has increased its historical patterns of inequality and exploitation (Hoffmann et al., 2020). After desegregation and the wave of social, political, and ecologically focused legislation passed in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., The Civil Rights Act, The Voting Rights Act, The Environmental Policy Act, The Education Amendments of 1972, etc.), the conservative, patriarchal, and capitalist arms of America whiplashed under President Reagan (Moser, 2024). Since Reagan's terms in office, trillions of dollars have been siphoned by the top 10% (Smith et al., 2021; Kuhn et al., 2020); healthcare and the power of self-determinacy are being stripped from women (McCloskey et al., 2021; Stoneburner et al., 2025; Russell, 2025); queer and civil rights are being dissolved alongside public institutions that sought the preservation of political participation (Trenary et al., 2025); people of color are being victimized by a growing police and surveillance state (Monahan, 2025); and Earth itself is stampeding towards climate tipping points that endanger life as we know it (Lange et al., 2026; Hatfield et al., 2025).

There have been multiple theoretical advancements to normative forms of rational planning, each in response to unequal power dynamics in planning processes caused by the dissolution of public institutions and democratic processes. Moreover, all forms of progressive theory in planning call into question planning institutions' relationship and boundaries towards the public—particularly the public(s) that have survived and lived under generational oppression. Normative forms of planning include, but are not limited to, policy analysis, cost-benefit analysis, Euclidean zoning, GIS spatial analysis, overly technical language, expert-driven decision making, and takes place within insular bureaucracies. Normative and traditional forms of planning not

only have very little opportunity for public participation, they also impede shared power across diverse social participants and stakeholders (Davidoff, 1965; Innes & Booher, 2010; Lange, 2020; Healey, 2020). The more that public participation is excluded, particularly in times of a coalescing autocracy, the more a planning institution relies upon rational comprehensive planning; there are numerous historical examples domestically and internationally of this pattern (Brower, 1983; Mazumdar, 2000; Müller, 2024).

Conversely, advancements in planning theory that have critiqued and questioned planning's culpability in oppressive structures include citizen participation and inclusion (Arnstein, 1969), advocacy and equity planning (Davidoff, 1965; Krumholz, 1982), collaborative planning (Innes & Booher, 2010; Healey, 2020), communicative planning (Healey, 1999), radical and insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2009), and therapeutic planning (Erfan, 2017; Sandercock & Attili, 2014). Progressive forms of planning theory have sought a broader, fairer, more inclusive, and more humanistic process to the praxes of urban and regional planning. Each progressive planning aberration demands a version of procedural power that is fundamentally shared across peoples—if not an outright confrontation with the abuse of power (Forester, 1982). Finally, all advancements of planning theory call deeply into question the behavioral and experiential realities of planners and publics alike located at the nexus of the institutional, societal, and planetary. This dimension is colloquially termed the embodied domain and is currently the battleground in the United States.

This Moment of White Nationalism and Its Relevance to Planning Theory in America

The project of democratization of urban and regional planning *necessitates* the deconstruction of white supremacy as an institutional, cultural, economic, legal, and political 'form' that has functioned to preserve and protect racialized wealth, privilege, and status in America (Oconnel, 2021; Williams, et al., 2023). That being stated, Table 1 showcases a partial list of the *recent* federal and state level actions taken to undermine and even halt progressive teaching and research practices in our colleges and universities. These actions explicitly undermine democratic principles of knowledge construction, free speech, and political participation. These actions also, if followed by practitioners and researchers alike, break codes of professional ethics in practice and research; which to be clear were always dubiously followed even by the creator of these ethics – the American Planning Association (Flyvbjerg, 2013).

Table 1 – Actions Directed Towards Universities by the Trump Administration

Educational Censorship: The deliberate restriction of research and teaching of subject matter related to race, gender, equity, inclusion, and critical race theory (e.g., in Arkansas, Florida, Texas, Mississippi, and Wyoming).

Anti-DEI Legislation: States have passed laws banning diversity, equity, and inclusion offices and initiatives in public colleges (e.g., Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio). For example, in 2025 in 32 states there were 93 bills introduced in state legislatures seeking to limit academic subject matter to exclude ‘DEI’ materials.

Undermining Tenure and Faculty Governance: Measures reducing faculty power/unions and attacking tenure. This is part of a larger historical trend of universities undermining faculty tenure and removing protections of established academics.

Federal Leverage and Pressure: Investigations by federal departments into DEI initiatives and allegations of antisemitism, along with threats to revoke federal funding, have been used to push for specific campus policies. For example, in exchange for having \$790 million reinstated, Northwestern University will pay the Trump Administration \$75 million over three years and pass a series of policy changes.

Restricting Student/Faculty Expression: Policies forcing the removal of certain topics from syllabi and controlling classroom discussions, particularly regarding the war in Gaza and racial justice. For example, the Florida Department of Government Efficiency reviews undergraduate course syllabi, topics of discussion, and faculty information in an effort to screen for ‘ideological studies’ (e.g. course that teach on race, equity, inclusion, gender, queer identity, etc.).

Dismantlement of the Department of Education: Based upon executive order, the dismantlement of the Federal Department of Education into other federal agencies. The Department of Education is a leading body of civil rights protections and resource allocations for students in need.

Dismantlement of Federal Grant System(s): The Trump Administration has systematically reduced federal funding, without Congressional approval, to numerable federal agencies and departments that support the scientific community, universities, environmental protection, public health, and the social safety net.

(Monahan, 2026); (Casey, 2025); (U.S. Department of Education, 2025); (Adams, 2025)

If planning were to purely follow the will of the Trump administration – rational planning would be the predominant form, and potentially the only form, of planning practice and pedagogy. It has been well showcased in American history that rational planning, as a methodological and epistemological expression of positivism, is a socially insular technological approach to instrumenting planning processes for the construction of cities, regions, and nation-states alike (Boyer, 1986). But most importantly a tool to control the recreation of socio economic benefits of cities and economies with the power to steer such benefits to whites (Oconnel, 2021; Williams, et al., 2023). Historically epitomized by the White City of 1893, rational planning during its inception idealized the ‘thinking,’ ‘vision,’ and ‘culture’ of white

men, and their constructed edifices that sought to stand the test of time in what is known as the Gilded Era of the United States. The White City, displayed at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago deliberately excluded exhibitors of color and displayed abusive stereotypes towards native and indigenous peoples. During the Gilded Era, the nadir of race was occurring nationally with particular emphasis on the south and Jim Crow after Reconstruction (Fulop, 2013; LaVallee & Waring, 2015). The nadir of race was perhaps the first major period of white rage and whiplash against black progress and future potential (Anderson, 2016).

When we fast forward through the horrors of Jim Crow, a second world war, and urban renewal in America, a central question emerged and is still at the heart of today's differentiated conceptions of planning: Is the city the built environment, or the people within it? For rational planning, despite proclaiming the support of liberty of the public(s), focuses so exclusively on counting, measurement, and cartesian perception, that applications of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion are excluded (Lange, 2020; Innes & Booher, 2010; Scott, 2020; Imbroscio, 2019). This is due to how planning has traditionally operated from the Gilded Era and into the Neoliberal Era; the ability to set a 'playing' field for purchasing power both at the micro and macro levels. This is planning's orientation, through rational positivism underscored by liberalism, to what the nation deems 'freedom' in capitalist United States; the freedom to unfettered linear progression (Imbroscio, 2019). In such a playing field, the power of purchasing, the power of ownership, and thus access to linear profit/wealth creation, is skewed along racial and gendered lines. Thus, is the right to the city really just the right to purchase and own land, property, and people in America (Lipsitz, 2006)?

Currently, the active undermining of progressive forms of planning theory that have sought to challenge structures of inequity and injustice are well underway (see Tables 1-2). Simply, it is difficult to research and practice the deeper contextualization, needs, and benefits of equity, inclusion, advocacy and so forth in universities when there are imposing actions that result in defunding, censorship, revisionist history, and political persecution. In essence authoritarian actions taken to omit the realities of lives that exist outside of the current political economy of the United States (Weaver & Prowse, 2020). For example, Florida State University, the university that awarded my doctoral degree in urban and regional planning in 2020, the university where I taught *Collective Decision Making*, is a much different place due to the acute ideological shifts to the extreme right and censorship on part of the Florida Executive Office of the Governor, Florida Board of Governors, the Florida legislature, and the newly created Florida Department of Government Efficiency.

Censorship, through legislation such as the Stop Woke Act, has restricted schools in Florida from speaking on systemic racism and gender disparities across society. There are legislative pieces throughout the country that mirror, mimic, or act analogous to the Stop Woke Act. The Stop Woke Act (HB-7) implements the following:

- Critical Race Theory training is an unlawful employment practice.
- Gives employees, parents, and students the right to private action when discriminated against

through Critical Race Theory.

- Protects Florida's K-20 students and employees from Critical Race Theory indoctrination.
- States that HB-7's principles uphold that no members of one race, color, national origin or sex are morally superior.

By linking critical race theory to practices of 'indoctrination,' the Florida legislature has deliberately undermined critical analysis of historical and ongoing racialized structures of inequity and injustice within the state of Florida. If I were still teaching at Florida State University, I would not be able to accurately portray the historical constructions of disenfranchisement – or their methodological and theoretical solutions – as I have attempted to do so here.

As legislation such as HB-7 are replicated across the country supposedly purporting institutional independence and neutrality, the political rhetoric that generally surrounds such legislations seeks a 'return' to a 'pure' time located in the past (Lowery, 2014; Jung, 2015). A return to a past that deliberately mirrors the Great White City of 1893, the whiteness of the founders, and even beyond (Roediger, 2002). Such language, legislation, and institutional practices are hallmark examples of fascist maneuvers that seek to dismantle education, art, free expression, cultural exchange, and democracy itself (Silverblatt, et al., 2012). Thus, institutional practices that report, support, and implement processes of 'rational' fairness but *exclude* evidentiary information/data, lived experiences, and histories of oppressed populations are ensuring those with material resources, power, and status maintain their position through force (Lipsitz, 2006). Part of moving forward for educators in urban and regional planning is the need to teach students how to read through the smoke screens, the lies, and powerful practices of manipulation (Flyvbjerg, 1998). It is not indoctrination to teach practices of empirical methods of observation that deconstruct and confront falsehoods, revisionist history, propaganda, and tactics of manipulation.

There are two key examples that have come in mid-2026 of manipulative tactics that place white votes on top of a political racial hierarchy. Currently unfolding is the largest gerrymandering effort in modern America politics aimed at cracking majority minority districts to favor Congressional Republicans ahead of the 2026 midterms. The Supreme Court's ruling in *Louisiana v. Callais* overturned Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. Section 2 specifically prohibited states and local governments from discriminating and disenfranchising voters along race. Thus, mass gerrymandering has been cleared in the America south resulting in congressional representation that will not adequately reflect the voting demographics. Secondly, is the SAVE America Act that seeks to mandate voting restrictions in the name of election integrity. The act would require demanding levels of identification that would result in the disenfranchisement of women and people of color. Despite lacking the 60 votes required to pass the act in the Senate, the act did pass the House of Representatives.

Table 2 – The Institutionalization, Enactment, and Enforcement of White Nationalism by the Trump Administration

Rhetoric – The widespread usage of, or a reference towards, a puritanical and perfect past that has been ‘destroyed’ by people of color. The widespread usage of racial slurs, such as calling Michelle and Barack Obama ‘apes.’ Moreover, the administration has made large efforts to propagate American ‘exceptionalism’ to confront what they believe is the international efforts to replace white America. The administration has peddled fear and vigilance through the replacement theory to justify near constant hostile actions towards populations of color.

Revisionist History – There have been numerous Presidential executive orders directed towards museums to remove displays and exhibits of slavery, as well as large efforts made to restore confederate monuments.

Mass Deportations – Enormous efforts have been made, with equally enormous amounts of funding, through the administration to deport immigrants from the United States – often resulting in mass trauma, fear, and cultural damage. The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement have been accused of openly breaking constitutional law – particularly due process.

ICE Detention Facilities – These are the facilities for housing the detained persons accused of breaking immigration processes and laws. The facilities have numerous reports of human rights abuses that range from death, physical abuse, medical neglect, unsanitary conditions, lack of back provisions, and more. A key example of these facilities are Delaney Hall and Camp East Montana

Defunding USAID – The administration defunded the U.S. Agency for International Development due to the belief that the agency was ‘corrupt,’ ‘wasteful,’ and run by radical leftists. The defunding, and inflammatory rhetoric, was used to drive the administration’s nationalistic “America First” doctrine.

Pardoning White Extremists – Working in tandem with a politicized justice department, the administration pardoned over 1,500 individuals involved in the January 6, 2021 Capitol attack. These pardons included the leaders and members of the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers.

Political Persecution of Protests – A weaponized justice department, and numerous executive orders, have openly sought to not only suppress political protests of the administration, but only justify the use of violence. The national guard has been deployed to a number of cities, as a demonstration of force, to quell unrest – the City of Minneapolis a key example. The administration has widely referred to protests, and the demonstrators therein, as agitators, and even terrorists.

(Acevedo, 2025); (Amnesty International USA, 2025); (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2026)

Progressive advancements of planning theory that support embodiment

The Thread Between the Advancements

All advancements of progressive planning theory and practice focus on the oppressed through a conscientization of human need, suffering, and the forces of capital predation. All aberrations in planning theory focus on the human, and do so seeking a bridge between the

universal, the collective, but also the inherently unique lived experiences of diverse peoples. In so doing, these theoretical attempts seek to make explicit the structures of power in America that tilt the table towards greed, exploitation, and dominance (Lipsitz, 2006; Harvey, 2007; Giroux, 2021).

Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning

Davidoff's (1965) thesis is that planning needs to be fundamentally a political and *plural* process – including the participation of the planners themselves. Moreso, Davidoff believed that planners likewise should engage in this political process in order to aid what Davidoff referred to as 'the right choice;' a deliberate but albeit coded call to conscience and integrity. An important, and crucial, call to values that came just after the end of segregation the year before in 1964. This is a time in which urban renewal frequently sought the destruction of neighborhoods of color and the construction of high rise public housing – the construction of ghettos (Fullilove, 2016). Challenging the historically insular, single agency derived, 'technical' decision-making was the hallmark of Davidoff's work. An integral argument for the decentering of power structures that long served to uphold pseudo-neutrality so that planners, and the planning process itself, may be more transparent and open to social values and rigorous debate. Thus, the allocation of resources based upon 'objectives,' which historically were hardly above critical reflections based upon race, class, and gender, have a chance to uphold pluralism and equality. Davidoff rightly pointed out the paradox and hypocrisy of rational planning. For example, Davidoff argued that if rational planning were to seek 'alternative' plans in order to uphold the best possible chances of a 'right decision,' then why are planners under such scrutiny to be loyal to their agencies? Why are planners who support alternative plans for 'just' decision making considered contentious?

The Ladder of Citizen Participation

If Davidoff introduced the idea of politicizing the planning process, Arnstein (1969) sought to what degree citizen participation is actually meaningful. Despite not being a form of 'planning,' Arnstein's work is still fundamental teaching in planning programs both at the undergraduate and graduate level. The central conception put forth by Arnstein is the representation of boundaries between public institutions and the public(s). Within the representation put forth, Arnstein meaningfully displayed how public citizens typically are excluded heavily from planning decision making...or at times simply taken for granted through run of the mill tokenism. At the top of the ladder are three rungs that represent "citizen power." These rungs begin with partnership, then delegated power, and finally, citizen control. The highest any form of planning process typically takes is partnership – to be explained later in collaborative and communicative planning – and this is still very far from the norm (Beveridge, et al., 2024).

Equity Planning

Krumholz et al. (1975) introduced another central question that the field of planning is still struggling to answer. How does, and what would happen if done, a city/state/region make

equity their planning *priority*? In other words, how to not only reorient the structures of power, flipping capital development to helping those in need? Perhaps the most important takeaway from the inception of equity planning is the role of governance. Equity planning (Krumholz, 1982) is in a way a departure from the capitalist infused liberalism that has dominated the United States. Rather than governance being the generation and preservation of *capital*, equity planning is the redistribution of resources, and material needs (including the spatial) to populations and groups of people that have been born into systems of dominance and oppression (Stafford, et al., 2024). Krumholz's efforts were oriented directly to those impoverished, as poverty is a deliberate and historical construction in the United States, through public transit, housing, and neighborhoods.

Collaborative and Communicative Planning (1990-2010s)

From the 1990's through to the 2010s progressive planning praxes were dominated with the promulgation of the communicative turn in planning (Healey, 1996). Utilizing Habermas' communicative action theory as a foundation, communicative planning sought the incorporation of multiple forms of information, knowledge, and collaborative relationships/partnerships into the planning process. If planning were to truly incorporate the teachings of Davidoff, Arnstein, Krumholz, and others such as Foucault (Fischler, 2000), then collaborative and communicative planning was meant to be the methodological and procedural 'how.' The purpose of this 'turn' was multiple, ranging from conflict resolution techniques to the theorized 'leveling' of power dynamics in the planning process. With the added element of pragmatism derived from Dewey (Dewey, 1986), collaborative and communicative planning does continue to have some success in building coalitions, relationships, and partnerships across subject, sector, scale, and also bridging formal and informal domains (Innes & Booher, 2010). However, critiques of communicative planning name it an inadequate solution to the incorporation of multiple knowledge(s), cultures, and stakeholders for the intent of mitigating power dynamics – specifically those of global capital economies (Fainstein & Fainstein, 2013). Outcomes of justice and equity are still very much left in the domain of intent and goals. The major reasons for this is that communicative planning still borrows heavily from rationalism, paradoxically despite its open critique of rationalism, and such adjoining often results in the relativizing of suffering, inequity, and power (McGuirk, 2001).

Radical and Insurgent Planning

It is difficult to place radical and insurgent planning in a chronological time as the traditions they borrow from, speak on, and are inspired by, are very old – utopianism, anarchism, egalitarian and communalism, socialism and Marxism, and long traditions of social/political mobilization. However, in the 1960-1970's, and well into the 1980's, radical planning emerged as a core component to planning and urban theory (Miraftab, 2009; Flyvbjerg, 1986). In essence, radical planning is based upon a theorization of a decentralized, egalitarian, and communal society (Friedmann, 1987; Flyvbjerg, 1986). Such a relational society would indeed be a 'radical' departure from the hyper-individualized, property driven, capitalist society of America.

Friedmann (1987) provided an in-depth framework for radical planning, but particularly he underpinned radical planning with collective self-reliance and decolonization. Friedmann simultaneously, and extensively, critiqued rational planning arguing that the quality of action(s) taken by planning institutions, through social learning and social mobilization, is far more important than technical expertise. Such argumentation sits squarely in the middle of radical and insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2009). As insurgent planning, in a complementary manner, are the informal actions taken by marginalized people(s) to counter neoliberal capitalism, structures of hegemonic power, and even cultural imaginaries that make light of the plight of the oppressed (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2025). Together, radical and insurgent planning are dramatic subversions to traditional models of planning practice and theory (Bear, 2003).

Therapeutic Planning

The collection of therapeutic planning methods and traditions are based upon the successes of historical praxes that originate in social learning, social activism/mobilization, radical planning, insurgent planning, equity/advocacy planning, communicative action theory, pragmatic education, and the projects of inclusion and democratization of planning (Freidmann, 1987; Habermas 1990; Davidoff, 1965; Krumholz, 1982; Miraftab, 2009; Dewey, 1986; Innes and Booher, 2010; Freire, 2018). Therapeutic planning is the pursuit of *catharsis* for those that have been historically abused through policy, and through the use of creative methodologies, that make their story, plight, and identity(s) manifest (Lange, 2022; Sandercock & Attili, 2014; Erfan, 2017). The central question of therapeutic planning is how do practitioners, public(s), and people(s), thread history, lived experience, and human need into more equitable policy through affective and narratively-based methodologies? This question differentiates greatly from communicative planning's reliance on consensus.

Therapeutic planning methodologically breaks open the emotive, affective, and relational to break down planning's heavily over utilized abstractionism. Therapeutic planning literature is asserting argumentation for the usage of creative multi-dimensional methods and technologies to influence policy, decision-making, and outcomes across space, time, land, cultures, and societies (Erfan, 2017; Lange, 2022; Sandercock and Attili, 2014; Sandercock, 2023). More, therapeutic planning literatures are being put forth as not just societal interventions, but as bottom-up processes that are akin to community-based participatory planning to adjust entire development processes and policy as originated through collective action and interdependent co-creation (Lange, 2022; Erfan, 2017). In so doing, therapeutic planning is focused on narrative construction to show, not tell, the stories of people to influence policy construction directly through lived experiences and histories.

The Growing Importance of the Embodied Dimension

Through time, the political and *embodied* dimensions of story have become increasingly important in practice, theory, and pedagogy. Radical, insurgent, and therapeutic planning all deal inherently with story, the affective, the lived, and the behavioral. They are deliberate attempts at altering *perception and policy* to influence change for the alleviation of suffering – whether

through outright mobilization or through affective expression and co-creation (Lange, 2020). The embodied domain of story is the literal manifestation of pluralism that Davidoff sought, it is the documentation of suffering that gives purpose to equity planning, and it is the methodological threading of knowledge(s) that communicative planning sought to achieve. The most primordial of human experiences, story, the journey between maternity ward and crematorium, is the very foundation in which progressive planning theory stands upon. For it is the choices of human beings that determines the direction of power – however large or small.

The Sons of Joseph Barr – The Refugee from Kovno, Russia – A Case and Example



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The following narrative is the personal family legacy of my Ashkenazi Jewish ancestors. The partially autoethnographic narrative is a description of how state persecution, cultural hatred, and even the Holocaust have shaped their lives, and my own. The contestation with white nationalism, and the forces that drive it, is the thread that connects the lives of Joseph Barr, his children, and my own to the world beyond. The following narrative is a concentrated timeline of the lives of my immediate Jewish family and ancestors. The story functions to accomplish a few things; 1) make very real the consequences of white nationalism and supremacy that the Trump administration is peddling, and the potential doom that could await many if allowed to fully manifest; 2) demonstrate the embodied domain in which the progressive forms of planning theory stand upon; and 3) sensitize younger generations as to *why* progressive planning theory and the democratization of planning is vital, but also an ongoing challenge; 4) demonstrate the colossal power capable of a purely administrative, militarized, and hyper-rational state driven by hate; and 5) demonstrate the *generational* legacies, impacts, traumas, and experiences of oppression. This narrative also includes unpublished and unarchived photos, to sensitize the depth of these histories and realities, taken in WWII when concentration camps were initially being liberated. They were in my great uncle Edwin's, who served in the infantry of WWII, possession and passed down generationally.

Joseph Barr was born on March 18th, 1886 in Kovno, Russia. Kovno (now Kaunas, Lithuania) was located within the Pale of Settlement, the western edge of the Russian Empire. This region, decreed by Catherine II, encompassed modern day Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova. The Pale of Settlement, established in 1791, served as a functional Jewish ghetto containing upwards of five million Jews. Yiddish would be the language heard throughout the impoverished shtetls and cities of the region. The Pale of Settlement served to prevent the Jewish people from entering Russia's interior, and to restrict their economic and religious influence on the Christian population. Despite this geographic segregation Kovno did have a multiethnic life, contained a number of Jewish businesses and temples, and served as a major intellectual hub for Eastern European Jewry.

Rapid urbanization was occurring in the Pale prior to World War I. Here, Joseph as a young boy began his trade as a cutter – a person who measured and precisely cut fabric for later

tailoring and assembly. At this time it is currently unknown what Joseph's home life was like, but he did set sail for America and arrived at Ellis Island on February 26th, 1898 on the verge of his twelfth birthday. What *is* known however is that the years prior and after Joseph's birth, pogroms (anti-Jewish riots from 1881-1921 that lead to widespread murder, rape, looting and destruction of Jewish communities) were sweeping through the southern and western provinces of the Russian Empire. Kovno was mostly insulated from the worst of the violence. The Jews were falsely accused of being the masterminds behind the assassination of Tsar Alexander II on March 13, 1881. Thus, Joseph knew from the time of his birth, state sponsored hatred and violence simply for being Jewish – simply for existing.

As was common during this era, Joseph fled alongside the massive waves of Jews emigrating from the Eastern European region seeking refuge. It is not known directly how, but Joseph was sponsored to come to New York City by Cohen and Levison on Broadway. Cohen and Levison were located in the garment district and served as an expression of collective Jewish agency and self-determinacy. The garment industry was central to Jewish life and industry in New York City. Here Joseph would continue his work as a cutter, and at a business that was at the forefront of the new demand for ready-to-wear clothing. Jewish workers labored long hours, often in tenement sweatshops, to pursue the "American Dream;" for a chance at a life beyond toil, suffering, and fear.

As Joseph was beginning this new life at the turn of the century and beyond, Kovno, Russia would begin to witness mass scale horrors. Kovno was a key stronghold of the Russian Empire, and in 1915 it fell to the German army during WWI. To prevent German forces from taking resources, the Russian army expelled all Jews from Kovno. The forced exodus of the Jewish people was followed by mass theft by the Russian army of Jewish belongings. As part of a scorched earth strategy, mass destruction of communities and neighborhoods came after the ransacking. During WWI Jews were conscripted by force, used as fodder on the frontlines, and prevented from taking any officer position in the Russian military. It was rumored that Jewish medical doctors could not be trusted as they may kill wounded Russian soldiers to weaken the army from the inside. Russia would not occupy Kovno again until August of 1944 after relinquishing the Lithuanian territory to the Central Powers through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

As the Jews of the Lithuania region attempted to rebuild, participate in municipal life, and even advocate for Lithuanian separation after WWI, Joseph was granted naturalization on July 12, 1910. He even managed to eventually open his own tailoring practice, and during which time he married and had three children. Joseph married Bertha, also a Jewish immigrant from the Russian Empire, on November 7th, 1915. Then in roughly two year increments the newlyweds had three children; Alma Barr on November 12th, 1917; Mortimer Barr on August 10th, 1919; and Edwin Barr on January 8th, 1921. Joseph was a demanding and exacting father – known for his anger. As an exile in the Jewish diaspora, and a survivor of state sponsored violence and slaughter, he placed enormous expectations of success and industriousness on his children. As perhaps an unintentional symbol of patriarchal and class values, Joseph withheld love and

affection often in the belief that strength is necessary to survive this world as a Jew. No doubt also a byproduct of laboring in the garment district to economically survive.

Now there is very little information on the Barr family through the 1920's and through the Great Depression – though it can be assumed that Joseph's position in the ready-to-wear garment industry provided the family some measure of relief. Though it need be said that America was *never* a refuge for Jewish immigrants. 1920s America contained the rise and peak of the Ku Klux Klan, and beyond their racial hatred the Klan also included antisemitism as part of their core ideology. Henry Ford published extensively his own propaganda stating that Jews were at the center of an international finance conspiracy. The Immigration Act of 1924 deliberately attempted to limit Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe, and higher education systems of the United States implemented quota caps to limit the enrollment of Jewish students. Jews in the United States experienced severe deed restrictions – known as restrictive covenants – that prevented them from renting and purchasing property in the early 1900s. All of this occurred as international forces and propaganda placed conspiratorial blame on the Jews for WWI as part of a supposed attempt at war propheteering. To make matters worse, things across the pond were turning grim for the Jewish people.

Back in Kovno, and in Europe broadly, the undercurrents of war and weaponized hatred were on the move. After WWI the Jews of Lithuania experienced a partial flourishing, but it was short lived as the authoritarian regime under President Antanas Smetona lasting from 1926-1941 came into power after a successful coup to overthrow the newly democratically elected government. Life for the Jewish people of Lithuania turned back towards surviving a brutal antisemitic regime. A few years after Smetona's coup, and as part of the rising tide of nationalism and populism, the Germans, under the Third Reich, invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 catalyzing World War II. By June of 1941 Kovno was under occupation by Nazi Germany. From then until the return of Russian control of 1944, the Jews of Kovno were overwhelmingly and systematically slaughtered. The few that were kept alive were placed in small overcrowded ghettos. If Joseph had not fled, he and his family would not have survived. Personally, I have always wondered what ancestors, perhaps close relatives of Joseph, of my own, never made it out.

In a cruel twist of fate, Joseph and Bertha's sons were drafted into the Army in 1942. Joseph fled the forces that were engulfing Europe, and now his sons were drafted by a nation that was no friend of the Jews to assist in this global war. A war catalyzed by Adolf Hitler that sought the systematic extermination of Jews, the disabled, political dissidents, the Romani, and others. Mortimer went first in June, and would serve in the Army's Financial Corps because it was believed Jews were skilled in finance. Edwin followed in November and would serve in the infantry as a heavy gunner (photo 1) helping push into German territory. Mortimer did not see action, but Edwin never came back the same. From what is known Edwin was part of the efforts that attempted to rescue what survivors they could from the concentration camps. It is not known if Edwin took the following photos, but they came from his detachment, and he kept them in his possession. These photos are part of a larger collection that have never been officially

archived or registered.

Edwin was in Halle, Germany in May of 1944 (photo 2). The only reason Edwin would have been there, as part of the infantry, was to assist in either two tasks; 1) the liberation of one or more of the camps in or around Halle; and/or 2) the push to Berlin in the final days and weeks of the war. The photos shown here are generational heirlooms in the Barr family legacy. Nonetheless, what they show is the grim and devastating toll of the Nazi's Final Solution. These photos most likely came from the main camp - Birkhahn-Motzlich (though it is well within possibility they were taken on the way to Halle as made clear by photo 3 of Cologne - there were tens of thousands of camps, ghettos, and incineration sites). As the primary camp of Halle, Birkhahn functioned as a satellite subcamp to Buchenwald. Birkhahn provided the Nazi military with aircraft parts through forced labor. Nonetheless, it would make logical sense for Edwin to be photographed here in May of 1945 as the camp stopped operations the month prior in April of 1945.

One particular photo stands out. In photo 4 a boy/young teenager is standing, eyes glued to the row of corpses. Some of the bodies were clothed and some nude, but all of them emaciated. Near the boy is what appears to be civilians – which was common as Allied soldiers forced German citizens to manage the dead – digging mass graves. In multiple photos it is clear that military personnel were overseeing civilians either carrying bodies or digging mass graves. The scenes beg for answers to innumerable questions – predominant of which is the enormity of the scale of human slaughter. Would that explain why American soldiers forced a child to dig mass graves despite having no culpable possibility of partaking in the atrocity? Did they force him to watch? Why? Regardless, Edwin witnessed all of this as a Jewish American soldier and oversaw the burial of countless bodies by German citizens with rifles in hand.

Soon after both of the Barr sons would return home at the end of 1945/beginning of 1946. However, they returned home to news of the death of their father Joseph. Joseph died in August of 1945 of heart disease. Thus, it stands that in the final months of Joseph's life, his son Edwin, was fighting in the final days of the Third Reich and directly witnessing the aftermath of the Final Solution. Neither Edwin, or Mortimer, spoke or shared openly their experiences from WWII – they spoke only in fragments of memories.

The need for *human* intimacy and expression – Training planners in embodiment

Planning in the United States focuses enormously on numerical demography and the material components of society (land, property, economy, housing, infrastructure, etc.). To a degree this is logical due to what is bureaucratically 'visible.' However, planning has suppressed the 'immaterial' that is at the core of all people, no matter their race, creed, religion, sexuality and so forth. The differentiated, and even conflicting, lived worlds of people(s), and the urban recreations of lived subjectivity as segregated by race, gender, and class (Goetz, et al., 2020; Williams, 2024). Planning programs in universities have largely created the dilemma that the technical practice we teach does not equate to the reality vulnerable populations endure and survive – if anything, often the technical practice we teach keeps the vulnerable in survival (Bell,

2022; Jackson, et al., 2018). In other words, university programs often devote too little pedagogical material, and expect too little, when teaching how and why racialized and gender based histories, politics, and propaganda intensely shape the components of society that the profession of urban and regional planning proclaims it manages and oversees (Jackson, et al., 2018).

The Trump administration and elected representatives within the United States Congress, have continuously peddled racialized historical imaginaries such as those from Manifest Destiny as if it were a war cry for a return to a white dominance galvanized by men across class in one narrative of God's chosen - Hitler did the same (Johansen, 2017; Clair, 2025). Regimes fight for *imaginations* and they exploit grievances to foment hatred – this tactic is not new. Regimes fight for imaginaries because if one can control imagination, they can control behavior, lives, people(s) and entire societies. For if one can control imagination they can control systems of values – control the *total* right to the city – and in doing so has the power to control who lives and who dies (Yetiş, 2025; Lefebvre, 2008). Perhaps worse, the power to control who profits and who is exploited. Despite projecting independence, urban and regional planning practice has always sat in the nexus of these historical, cultural, economic, and political forces; more, urban planning is a key tool of these authoritarian praxes of dominance (Goodfellow, 2020). Urban planning has always been a fulcrum for either praxes of dominance or democratization – and our urban and rural landscapes become physical manifestations of these intentions.

In order to confront growing white nationalism, planning practitioners at all levels need the ability to not just advocate or work in the political process, they need to become embodied researchers in their own communities (Lange, 2020; Lange, 2022). The reasons for this power inversion, rather than the ability to work in informal spaces, are manyfold (see Table 4). Ethnographically speaking, knowledge of 'other,' knowledge of 'histories,' and knowledge of 'culture' can never be fully translated through alphanumerical abstraction (Sweet, 2018; Sandoval, 2013). The best any ethical researcher or practitioner can hope for is the approximation of words and documents to the living realities of those they seek to describe (Kincheloe, et al., 2014). Moreover, planners, if given the opportunity to research/be with their own communities, must also be given the opportunity to work on a long-term basis (Lange, 2022). Planners must build relationships with their communities, particularly communities of need that have been historically and presently oppressed (Lange, 2020). For it is not just for the reason of building trust, it is to understand why *distrust* exists between oppressed peoples and public institutions. What are the constructions of inequity that play on repeat in our communities and through the lives of the vulnerable? How do we assist in expressing and giving audience as practitioners to grief, injury, and identity (Table 4 provides a small list of methodologies for this)? This deeper work takes time.

Table 3 – The Inversion of Power when Planning in Informal and Embodied Spaces

Interpersonal trust bridges sectors, formal/informal borders, interpersonal/behavioral boundaries, and culture in order to gain ‘insight’ into *contextualized* lived experiences. This trust is a product of time, openness, and permission. Disclosure takes more than a signature.

The ‘truth’ of a place, neighborhood, group, and community is dynamic, layered, and vulnerable. It takes time to find the pulse of a person, let alone a community.

Cultures and peoples that have been historically dominated within the United States are collective in nature, and thus planning interventions must take into account the diverse impacts on social relationships that serve to support survival and cultural expression.

Identities of people are as complex as the landscape themselves, and to reach descriptive understanding is only possible with repetitive, cyclical, and explicit ritualistic interactions over time.

Urban and regional planning is founded in the dominance of a historically white male elite. Thus, if planners are to enter communities and informal spaces for the purpose of structural change to alleviate suffering, they must first come to understand the suffering and grief of those they are helping through the historical knowledge frameworks of the community members.

All understandings and documentation interpreted by the planner must be reviewed by the community.

(Lange, 2020); (Lange, 2020); (Lange, 2022)

Paradoxically, the domain that has been traditionally excluded within *public* practice is the human, the embodied, the experiential, the intimate, the voiced, the generational, and even the temporality within life and death. It’s a domain that does not lend itself easily to policy, it demands principle driven policy frameworks (Healey, 2020), and escapes the boundaries cemented within the epistemologies of positivism. Thus, modern comprehensive rational planning stands in firm opposition to this domain (Friedmann, 1987). As such, it is the embodied dimension that gives purpose, and a ground floor, to democratic practices and methods seeking inclusion, diversity, and equity. The embodied domain is the expression and experience of *life* itself (Lange, 2022). However, life within embodiment is divorced from the historical social

Darwinism that perceived life and nature as a ranked kill or be killed system – embodiment is creation, tension, connection, and constructive struggle. The embodied domain arises from the constant change, the uncertainty, the unknown that complements and deliberately supports relational human and cultural expression (Lange, 2020). Embodiment is not a method of measure, of might or rule; but rather a dimension and method of directly confronting brutality.

Equity, and the democratization of urban planning, mandates that planners be able to recognize simultaneously their profession from an internal institutionalism (Healey, 2020), as

well as from their community members' lived experiences, health, wellbeing, and *needs* (Horton & Freire, 1990). For they are fundamentally inseparable; but it's a learned skill to integrate these polarized realities for policy and programming (Lange, 2020). Embodied planning is the deep personalization of bodies, space, time, and society across people and geographies to make *intimate* the realities and contexts of life (Buber, 1970; Jacobs, 1961). Embodiment, with its roots in social constructivism, could serve as a method of conscientization on part of the practitioner by operating through informal spaces, over time, and by permission from those that the planner is seeking to assist; or rather learn from (Table 4). From such a place of awareness embodied planning – with support of the theoretical foundations of the progressive advancements in planning – can *deliberately* intervene in dynamics of power, influence, and potential abuse of material resources in real time to mitigate the *recreations* of histories that need to be halted. It's about 'right action;' (Davidoff, 1965) a fundamental change in course and departure from economics of dominance, and it is planning as social mobilization as depicted by Friedmann (1987).

Table 4 – Embodied methodologies suited for urban planning

1. Walking interviews
2. Photovoice
3. Participant journals
4. Storytelling and community-based theater
5. Asset-based community development
6. Ethnographic participant observation
7. Urban drama labs
8. Urban art installations

The purpose of creative methodologies is multidimensional and includes the following: 1) to show the inherent interdependencies between all those who live in a county/area; 2) to act as witness for communal healing for deep traumas; 3) to learn and listen to lives different than one's own; 4) to generatively build capacity and share resources; 5) to build the will and ability to speak, voice, and share experiences, memory and bodies across space and time; 6) dismantle caustic boundaries and build communicative skills to uphold the belief that life is precious; 6) rebuild the communal public sphere; and 7) create the foundation for differentiated forms of collective expression, witnessing and resistance.

These are Orwellian times. To a stunning degree our impacts on those around us, our communities, our colleagues, and even our student bodies come down to a single praxis – the act to turn and face the abuse of power (Forester, 1982). The teaching of embodied planning is a practice of listening and observance both within formal and informal spaces (Beard, 2003; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2025). When planners are permitted the time – which is substantial – to work, speak, stand with, and deliberately support people, the resultant relationships they construct originate and are sustained through *emotion*. Such bonds made through intimacy and emotion are direct corrosives to the walls of technocracy (Forester, 2021). Thus, to teach embodiment, and

embodied planning, is to fundamentally integrate emotion as a point of origin, point of observance, point of understanding, but most importantly a point of communication (Fathulla & Willis, 2018). For when we permit our emotional internal world to feel the suffering and grief of others *with them*, there is no going back; and thus planners who *feel with* their communities are fundamentally augmenting the boundaries of public institutions through awareness, understanding, witnessing, recognizing, and integrating the stories of others in real time into practice and communal collective expression (Lelandais, 2014).

Such a process occurs *in the body* and between them, and is a deliberate act of emotional occupancy on part of the planner to adjust themselves to the reality of those they purportedly serve. The planner is then positioned to ground through lived experience and observance, how their working realities within bureaucracy impact the quality of human life in their communities (Sweet, 2018). Emotional occupancy, particularly when grounded in cultural humility, is a conceptual reframing within an embodied process of making real not just the life of cities, but the life and death of cultures, identities, families and whole worlds of being *as a deliberate lived reality and experience*. To deliberately step into the worlds of others as a lived experience as a deconstruction of apathy, passivity, and boundaries of segregation. The story of survival of Joseph Barr exemplifies this very dimension that is so often omitted in our regulatory constructions that ultimately serve as a method of erasure (Huss, 2023; Raccanelli, 2023). The intent of embodiment and emotional occupancy, as a deliberate redistribution of power and boundaries on part of the planner, is to assist in healing true tragedy and loss, and to assist in incarnating new modes of life that honor life and loss (Lange, 2020; Brummans, 2011). For as it currently stands, this moment of white nationalism, white supremacy, and the violence it doles, is historical and generational. A crisis of human suffering that is crashing like a white whiplash of history that is destroying cultural potentials and lives in mass. Thus, the question stands not just how do we ‘bounce back’ as resilience theorists so readily posit, but how do we heal and come back at all? What is recovery now in the face of so many colliding crises that are setting up a stage of true reckoning for the United States?

Unfolding within the United States is the beginning of concentration camps in the form of ICE detention facilities. Every ingredient for the United States to fall into a full authoritarian regime is present. Horrors are already unfolding in mass that manifest in the separation of children from parents, infants from mothers, the deportation of parents to countries they’ve never been to, and violence on every level (political, economic, cultural, etc). More, many are losing their lives in facilities that are little more than torture chambers due to severe neglect and abuse. All enacted through a goon squad emblematic of the Nazi SS, and directed by a leader that only seeks dominance at all costs. Who will hear these stories? Who will bear witness? Who will hold the hand of those marching for justice? When we reach the other side of this national crisis, planners, artists, organizers, elected representatives and community members will all need to come together to heal and ensure a new course of action is taken for future generations. Embodied methodologies will be key in supporting, capturing, and expressing that pursuit of dignity and democracy.

Conclusion

I am Zechariah Joseph Lange, MPA, PhD. I am the great grandson, through Mortimer, of Joseph Barr. My middle name is derived directly from him. I shared my family's story because as an Ashkenazi Jew, and on the 250th anniversary of the United States, to call attention to the forces that shaped the Barr family, and my own. The forces of hatred, bigotry, propaganda, and systematized state sponsored brutality that are on full display in the United States. The forces of white supremacy, white nationalism, and white xenophobia. This case is a reminder that where democracy, political participation, and inclusion end, systematized violence begins. Urban and regional planning practice, theory, and pedagogy are deeply intertwined not just with America's racialized past, but also confronting this deeply turbulent moment in American life and society. I fear without proper recourse America's democracy will fall and nightmares as witnessed in Kovno and Halle will follow. Whispers of these terrors are already emerging.

The progressive advancements to planning are generated from the embodied domain in a value system that seeks to nurture – and at times outright defend – human life. For what we create, co-create with others, as practitioners is not just buildings, pavement, roads, parks...we create places for life to be supported and expressed. The embodied domain is what connects every progressive form of planning together; the pursuit of health and happiness for those that have been robbed of it. More, the utilization of methodologies that place power in the hands of the vulnerable to give voice to where there has been disenfranchisement. Advocacy, equity, insurgent, radical, therapeutic planning theory and methodologies – standing on traditions of thought, theory and knowledge (social and experiential learning, Marxism, anarchism, pluralism, multiculturalism, decolonization, etc.) – push for a world that has never been given a full opportunity. All the progressive aberrations of planning have been developed, carried out, and continued are done so in confrontation with and contestation towards global structures of injustice and inequity. We must continue this effort now more than ever.

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Barr family history and photos are property of the author. All relevant research ethics have been followed.

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Conflicts of Interest Statement

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