This is a seminar about the ways that urban design contributes to the distribution of political power and resources in cities.

“Design,” in this view, is not some value-neutral aesthetic applied to efforts at urban development but is, instead, an integral part of the motives driving that development. Though many urban designers and architects often seem to regard “good design” as somehow independent from social and political factors affecting its production and use, design efforts are influenced by politics in at least two important ways. First, urban design proposals may be subject to challenge by a variety of groups during the planning and implementation process. Second, political values, whether tacit or explicit, are encoded in the resultant designs. Taken together, this two-way embeddedness may justify the use of a hyphen in urban design-politics.

The class investigates the nature of the relations between built form and political purposes through close examination of a wide variety of situations where public and private sector design commissions and planning processes have been clearly motivated by political pressures, as well as situations where the political assumptions have remained more tacit. We will explore cases from both developed and developing countries.

Applying insights from architects, planners, political scientists, historians, anthropologists, philosophers, and others, we will analyze urban design from a variety of perspectives, including lenses of race, gender, and class. Cases discussed will include extreme examples of politically charged environments: Hitler’s megalomaniacal plan for Berlin and designs for new capital cities around the world (Washington, D.C., New Delhi, Canberra, Brasília, etc.). We will then explore seemingly less extreme settings for urban design-politics, by focusing on public squares and on the origins and redevelopment of American public housing. Finally, the class will conclude with sessions exploring the design-politics of urban security and “urban resilience”—the attempt to rebuild (socially, politically, urbanistically) following sudden disasters.

The format of the class will be part slide lecture, part discussion. Participants will be responsible for four things: 1) Completion of readings in advance of each class (all readings are available on Canvas); 2) Involvement in seminar discussions, including at least one short presentation; 3) A short paper that uses selected readings to extract the “design-politics” of a place or project; 4) A term paper on a topic analyzing both the design and political history of an urban design intervention, to be presented during the final sessions of the class. All final papers will be due on the date of the last class, though earlier submissions are welcome.
**Inclusive Classroom**

MIT values an inclusive environment. I hope to foster a sense of community in this classroom and consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect. I welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. If this standard is not being upheld, please feel free to speak with me.

**Land Acknowledgement Statement**

We acknowledge Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land, and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional territories. The lands which MIT occupies are the traditional unceded territories of the Wampanoag Nation and the Massachusett Peoples. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced occupation of these territories, as well as the ongoing processes of colonialism and dispossession in which we and our institution are implicated. Beyond the stolen territory which we physically occupy, MIT has long profited from the sale of federal lands granted by the Morrill Act, territories stolen from 82 Tribes including the Greater and Little Osage, Chippewa, and Omaha Peoples.

As we honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous people connected to this land from time immemorial, we seek to Indigenize our institution and the field of planning, offer Space, and leave Indigenous peoples in more empowered position.

In particular, we should all acknowledge that Urban Design and Development never takes place on a *tabula rasa*. In analyzing how change happens over time, the work for this subject strives to understand the processes of marginalization and to seek ways to implement racial justice practices that can work to improve this.

**Writing Assistance**

The Writing and Communication Center offers free one-on-one professional advice from communication experts with advanced degrees and publishing experience. The WCC can help you further develop your oral communication skills and learn about all types of academic and professional writing. You can learn more about the WCC consultations at http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center and register with the online scheduler to make appointments through https://mit.mywconline.com. Please note that the WCC hours are offered Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., and fill up fast.

Some faculty already require their students to consult with the WCC’s communication experts on their papers, technical reports, and presentations — doing so is a good way not only to improve the quality of their students’ work but also to help students grow as academic writers and communicators.
The WCC has decades of experience preparing thousands of undergraduate and graduate students, as well as postdoctoral scholars and faculty, for positions in research, academia, and industry. They provide expertise in scientific and engineering writing as well as humanities and social science writing across various genres, including journal articles, scientific posters, dissertations, oral presentations, and slide design.

**Special Accommodations**

MIT is committed to the principle of equal access. Students who need disability accommodations are encouraged to speak with Disability and Access Services (DAS), prior to or early in the semester so that accommodation requests can be evaluated and addressed in a timely fashion. If you have a disability and are not planning to use accommodations, it is still recommended that you meet with DAS staff to familiarize yourself with their services and resources. Please visit the [DAS website](#) for contact information.

If you have already been approved for accommodations, please let me know.

**Academic Integrity**

In this subject, I will hold you to the high standard of academic integrity expected of all students at the Institute. Plagiarism and cheating are both academic crimes. Never (1) turn in an assignment that you did not write yourself, or (2) turn in an assignment for this class that you previously turned in for another class. Please see me if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism.

Please review MIT’s [Academic Integrity](#) policy and related resources (e.g., working under pressure; how to paraphrase, summarize, and quote; etc.) and contact me if you have any questions about appropriate citation methods, the degree of collaboration that is permitted, or anything else related to the Academic Integrity of this subject.

**Attendance and Contingency Plans for Illness/Absence**

Urban Design Politics meets in person on Mondays from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. EST (except on February 22, when Monday classes are held on the Tuesday, and on Institute holidays). This is a synchronous course where I expect students to participate in discussions and share reflections. Students are required to attend all sessions. If you are not able to regularly attend the full sessions of this subject, you should not enroll; please let me know at your earliest convenience if you wish to investigate a possible exception to this expectation. In case of illness or other necessary reason for absence, I have established a Zoom link and linked it to our Canvas site.

In the event that we need to pivot to remote delivery of this subject—due to illness or isolation protocols, I have established a Zoom link and linked it to our Canvas site.
Note that we will not otherwise regularly be recording our classes during the Spring 2022 semester, unless circumstances change.

**Student Support**

**Graduate Students: GradSupport**

As a graduate student, a variety of issues may impact your academic career including faculty/student relationships, funding, and interpersonal concerns. In the Office of Graduate Education (OGE), GradSupport provides consultation, coaching, and advocacy to graduate students on matters related to academic and life challenges. If you are dealing with an issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, you may contact GradSupport by email at gradsupport@mit.edu or via phone at (617) 253-4860.

Website: [https://oge.mit.edu/development/gradsupport/](https://oge.mit.edu/development/gradsupport/)

**Undergraduate Students: Student Support Services (S3)**

If you are dealing with a personal or medical issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, you should contact a dean in Student Support Services (S3). S3 is here to help you. The deans will verify your situation, provide you with support, and help you work with your professor or instructor to determine next steps. In most circumstances, you will not be excused from coursework without verification from a dean. Please visit the [S3 website](https://studentlife.mit.edu/s3) for contact information and more ways that they can provide support.

Website: [https://studentlife.mit.edu/s3](https://studentlife.mit.edu/s3)

**Calendar**
January 31


February 7

Four Perspectives on the Politics of Design

1. Political Science: How is political power constructed through space?


2. History: How is the past manipulated to serve the present?


3. Philosophy: How is meaning conveyed?


4. Science and Technology Studies: Do Artifacts have politics?


Five More Perspectives on the Politics of Design

1. Critical Race Studies: How does race affect design?


Optional:  

2. Gender Studies: How does gender affect design?


Optional:  
Helen Jarvis (with Paula Kantor and Jonathan Cloke), “Homes, Jobs, Communities and Networks” in Cities and Gender (Routledge, 2009), 186-215.

3. Political Economy: Who benefits from urban development?


Optional:  

4. Anthropology: Whose perspective matters?

5. Geography: How does urban space affect justice?


First Paper Assigned: Due in Class March 7, but presented to the class on March 14.

February 22 (Monday Classes Meet on Tuesday)
**The Political Extremes of Urban Design 1-- Berlin, From Pre-War to Post-Wall**


Optional:

February 28

**The Political Extremes of Urban Design 2--Capital Cities**

Required reading:


Optional:


For further Reading:

Göran Therborn, *Cities of Power* (read all of it)


March 7: **The Design-Politics of Public Squares**


Tali Hatuka, “Challenging Distance,” “Choosing a Place,” and “Reiconization: Beijing, Tiananmen Square,” from *The Design of Protest: Choreographing
Political Demonstrations in Public Space (University of Texas Press, 2018), 5-44 and 219-230.


Exercise 1 due, for discussion on March 14.

March 14: Discussion of Exercise 1

March 21: No Class: Spring Break

March 28: The Design-Politics of Developing Public Housing


April 4: The Design-Politics of Redeveloping Public Housing


April 11: **The Design-Politics of Urban Security**


Theo Deutinger, “Walls & Fences” and “Defensive City” from *Handbook of Tyranny* (Lars Müller Publishers, 2018), 84-95.

Interboro (Tobias Armbrorst, Daniel D’Oca, and Georgeen Theodore), “Exclusionary Amenity” (by Lior Jacob Strahilevitz), “Fence” (by James Rojas), “Fence 2,” “Gate” (by Gabrielle Esperdy), “‘No Loitering’ Sign,” “Wall,” and


April 18: No Class—Patriots’ Day

April 25:

**The Design-Politics of Urban Resilience**


May 2

**Student Presentations 1**

May 9

**Student Presentations 2**

Final Papers due no later than May 9