

CITYSCAPE | JUNE 6, 2020

To Trumpers, the Shared Space of the Street Is an Unprivatized Threat

By Justin Davidson

Photo: Chine Nouvelle/SIPA/Shutterstock

***New York* Is Committed to Covering This Essential Moment**

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For months, the pandemic has kept us away from one other and from public space. The city closed playgrounds, dog runs, swimming pools, and public buildings. Parks were left open, but

on sufferance. The curfew is a warning: The streets belong to the police, which tolerates their uses during daylight hours and for sanctioned behavior only. Violators will be clubbed. The marches are, by contrast, a way of declaring that public space belongs to the public — that protest, assembly, movement, and expression are not just abstract concepts but activities that can only take place in our collective home: on Fifth Avenue, on the plaza in front of the Barclays Center, on whatever corner an angry New Yorker might choose. The streets are where the violence against blacks often takes place, and the streets are where they must be remembered, where the authorities must be called to account.

The president and his allies articulate a different set of rights: the freedom to feel safe behind walls and gates. To them, a city is a collection of private and government buildings: a real-estate portfolio. In their worldview, streets are an unfortunate necessity, even a menace. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper described the city as a “battlespace,” to be dominated rather than shared. Esper recanted, but the attitude he expressed remains official policy. When Senator Tom Cotton calls for a full-scale military invasion of America’s streets, when the White House expands its perimeter with a quasi-medieval set of defenses, when the president trudges past a graffiti-encrusted public bathroom in Lafayette Square so he can hoist a bible and grimace in front of a boarded-up church, when the government guards the Lincoln Memorial from invented menace with a paramilitary phalanx — when all this strutting and snarling gets translated into weirdly gripping photographs, it’s clear that law and order equals the protection of real estate. These postures asserting the primacy of buildings, with their reassuring walls and locks and property lines, over the borderless badlands in between. That’s why looting has become such a flashpoint: not because it depletes society’s stock of deodorant and sneakers but because smashing a store window violates the boundary between public and private property.

Looting *is* a threat to civic life, especially in black and immigrant neighborhoods, where business owners lack the resources (or the insurance) to rebuild. But conservatives who howl about the appropriation of private property are less squeamish about the privatization of public property. The ultra-New Yorky oxymoron “privately owned public space” refers to areas under corporate control, where companies make the rules and citizens are permitted to loiter, because they are potential customers. The plaza at Hudson Yards, for example, is really an outdoor vestibule to a shopping mall. The concrete areas outside co-op apartment buildings seem indistinguishable from sidewalks, but if you linger there, you may be ejected. Even the security apparatus treats public space as sacrificial: Office buildings everywhere have been fortified since 9/11, which shifted the potential blast zone out of the lobby and onto the street. The super-tall towers along 57th Street exist because their builders, investors, and buyers see

Central Park as an expensive amenity, best enjoyed from behind a glass wall, 1,000 feet up in the air.

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In the last week, protesters all over the country have come to see their barely walkable cities the way New Yorkers always have seen theirs, as a matrix of public space that must be fluid, free, and safe for everyone at all times. The freedom to walk outside and shout is a bedrock of American democracy. Yet in many places, exercising that right means fighting the city's layout and design. Protests have jammed bridges and blocked traffic not just out of an urge to disrupt but also because the only way pedestrians can move around en masse is to borrow a few acres back from cars.

The street is where Black Lives Matter meets transit activism, which can sometimes be at odds. When you're fighting to keep black men from being murdered and children from being poisoned by lead paint, demands for bike lanes and pedestrian plazas can seem like a twee form of urbanism, even omens of gentrification. But both groups see the city street as a common good that anyone of any race should be able to navigate freely, without a license or a reason, or any equipment other than perhaps a pair of flip-flops. This principle may seem self-evident, but defending it demands constant struggle. Most cities administer their streets as conduits for enclosed private fiefdoms armored in steel and mounted on wheels. And so, when cops clear protesters from an interstate so that traffic can flow again, or gas them down on a highway verge, when personnel carriers roll through downtown Washington and NYPD officers ram their SUVs through a crowd, one of the laws they are enforcing is the principle of Vehicles First.

A city's sense of freedom resides in its streets. Most New Yorkers understand that intuitively, but it's a challenging concept if you're an insulated VIP who shuttles among properties in a motorcade and has little familiarity with the spaces in between. Donald Trump, the only president ever to move from a Manhattan apartment into the White House, has only ever known the sidewalk as the unfortunate no-man's land between his gilded bubble and an idling limo. Andrew Cuomo, a car enthusiast, can't understand why more lanes on a bridge might generate more traffic. The SUV-addicted Bill de Blasio insisted for weeks that the only way to take cars off the street so that pedestrians could keep out of sneezing distance from each other was to flood every corner with cops. Power means never having to walk. Absolute power means the ability to control when others do.

Now the defenders of real estate are pitted against Occupy All Streets, and regardless of which side declares victory in the short term, the future of our cities is at stake. Especially in New York, violence in the streets constitutes a dreadful threat. The city has weathered months of lockdown, fear, disease, death, and economic calamity; now, a lethal brawl or a wild shot, a stampede or an arrest gone wrong, could sicken the city for years. Macy's can restock, window glass can be reinstalled, charred police cars can be replaced. But faith in the future is fragile, and if it drains away on a bloodied pavement, it could turn New York back into a city of deadbolts and barricades, where residents hunker down or leave and the plywood storefronts never go away.

TAGS: URBANISM CITYSCAPE STREETS

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THE **Intelligencer** FEED

8:06 P.M. REPUBLICANS

Actually, D.C. Is Full Of 'Real People'

By SARAH JONES

GOP senators are sounding some old-fashioned dog whistles while arguing against statehood for Washington, D.C.

2:46 P.M.

Above all, it's about whether you look good

Trump says of masks that "I were in a tight situation with people," he would wear one. "I'd have no problem," he adds. "I had a mask on, I sort of liked the way I looked."

—@jeneps

2:44 P.M. CORONAVIRUS STIMULUS

GOP Hopes to Revive Economy by Making Life Harder for Unemployed

By ERIC LEVITZ

A partisan divide over whether jobless people should be poorer has thrown the next coronavirus relief package into jeopardy.

MOST POPULAR

1. Trump Blames Losing Campaign on Listening to ‘Woke Jared’

By JONATHAN CHAIT

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By ERIC LEVITZ

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4. Jeff Sessions Keeps Getting Worse

By ZAK CHENEY-RICE

5. Anthony Fauci’s Boss on Why Things Could Be Much Better Soon

By JEBEDIAH REED

2:42 P.M. CORONAVIRUS

Who Is Getting the Coronavirus in America Now?

By ADAM K. RAYMOND

Young people are driving the surge in cases across the U.S., but they’re not the only ones getting infected.

1:58 P.M.

Who are these mythical “real people”?

At anti-D.C. statehood press conference, Senator Steve Daines (R-Mt.) urges lawmakers to “go out to where the real people are at across the country and ask them where they think.”

—@FenitN



6/25/2020

Tom Cotton’s Oh-So-Principled Case for Denying D.C. Representation

By JONATHAN CHAIT

1:50 P.M. THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Trump Blames Losing Campaign on Listening to ‘Woke Jared’

By JONATHAN CHAIT

Trump decides to ignore his son-in-law and focus on voters who fear he isn't racist enough.

1:42 P.M.

The old Hong Kong may be vanishing quickly

The Hong Kong police moved swiftly on Wednesday to enforce China's new national security rules with the first arrests under the law, as the city immediately felt the chilling effect of Beijing's offensive to quash dissent in the semiautonomous territory.

The law was proving effective in tamping down the anti-government demonstrations that have wracked Hong Kong for more than a year. On Wednesday, the anniversary of Hong Kong's return to Chinese control — usually observed by huge pro-democracy marches — a scattered crowd of thousands protested, only to be corralled by the police and risk arrest for crimes that did not exist a day earlier.

Deploying pepper spray and water cannons to force protesters off the streets, the police arrested more than 300 people, including at least nine over new offenses created by the security law that takes aim at political activity challenging Beijing. One of the nine was a 15-year-old girl waving a Hong Kong independence flag, the police said.

In Hong Kong, Arrests and Fear Mark First Day of New Security Law

—**The New York Times**

12:37 P.M. JUST ASKING QUESTIONS

Anthony Fauci's Boss on Why Things Could Be Much Better Soon

By JEBEDIAH REED

NIH Director Francis Collins says he's "guardedly optimistic" we'll have at least one safe and effective vaccine by the end of the year.

12:30 P.M. HEALTH CARE

Deep-Red Oklahoma Narrowly Passes Medicaid Expansion

By SARAH JONES

More health care is popular, even in heavily Republican states.

12:29 P.M.

Things are *really* not getting better in Arizona

Arizona just reported *4,878* new COVID cases in the last 24 hours—a staggering record.

Arizona just reported *88* newly-reported COVID deaths—another staggering record.

Arizona just reported the percent positive rate of tests today was *28.3%* – this is...a numbing number.

—@VaughnHillyard

12:26 P.M. POLITICS

Another QAnon Sympathizer Knocks Off GOP Congressman in Colorado Primary

By ED KILGORE

Despite a Trump endorsement, Scott Tipton was no match for the owner of a gun-themed restaurant called Shooters Grill who defied public-health orders.

12:12 P.M. REOPENING

Indoor Dining Postponed Indefinitely in New York City

By ALAN SYTSMA

It's the only sensible thing to do.

11:31 A.M. SUPREME COURT

Trump Wants Another Supreme Court Nomination Fight Before November

By ED KILGORE

Trump thinks a confirmation battle could excite his base, but it would work both ways, particularly among Democrats who remember Merrick Garland.

11:10 A.M.

This probably wasn't what Trump imagined when he won

Photo: @ForecasterEnten/Twitter

10:54 A.M.

Things are not improving in Texas

The state of Texas reported 6,975 new coronavirus cases on Tuesday, its highest number of reported cases in one day yet.

—@ryanstruyk

9:34 A.M. VISION 2020

Trump's Plan: Run As Outsider Against 'Incumbent' Non-President Biden

By ED KILGORE

Trump of all people cannot overcome his incessant claims of presidential greatness and campaign for reelection as some sort of insurgent.

9:09 A.M.

Medicaid expansion gets through in Oklahoma, barely

Photo: @mcimaps/Twitter

8:39 A.M.

Dramatic revisions from May make the economic picture look brighter

Companies in June continued to bring workers back from their pandemic furlough as the national economy slowly came back to life.

Private payrolls grew by 2.369 million for the month, a bit lower than the 2.5 million expectation from economists surveyed by Dow Jones, according to a report Wednesday from ADP and Moody's Analytics.

The total actually represented a decline from the previous month, which saw a dramatic upward revision to 3.065 million. ADP initially said May saw a loss of 2.76 million. The firm did not immediately explain the massive shift.

June private payrolls rose 2.37 million and there was a big positive revision for May, ADP says

—CNBC

7:30 A.M. GAMES

10 Tips on How to Bring Your Sport Back During a Pandemic

By WILL LEITCH

Fake crowd noise is good. So is shaming players who break the rules.

6/30/2020 CORONAVIRUS STIMULUS

As the Pandemic Persists, Mitch McConnell's Senate Dawdles

By ED KILGORE

As vacation looms, Senate Republicans haven't even begun work on their version of a second stimulus bill, despite a new spike in coronavirus cases.

6/30/2020 VISION 2020

Democrats Are on Pace for a Down-Ballot Blowout

By ERIC LEVITZ

The party's lead in the congressional generic ballot is higher now than it was in 2018.

6/30/2020 COURT IS IN SESSIONS

Jeff Sessions Keeps Getting Worse

By ZAK CHENEY-RICE

A new profile at the *New York Times Magazine* vivifies the warning about Sessions that Coretta Scott King gave in 1986.

6/30/2020

Some good news

BREAKING: Martin Gugino, the Buffalo activist who was injured after being pushed by a Buffalo Police officer and falling backward during a June 4 protest, has been released from Erie County Medical Center, his attorney says. [@WBFO](#)

—[@MrozWBFO](#)

6/30/2020 COVID-19

Amazon's Coronavirus Problem Is Worse Than It Let On

By SARAH JONES

A COVID outbreak in Minneapolis is much worse than the company has admitted.

6/30/2020

Fact check: nope

What a quote from WH Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany: "The president does read...The president is the most informed person on planet Earth when it comes to the threats that we face."

—[@Yamiche](#)



6/30/2020

Trump Was Reportedly Briefed on Russian Bounties for Dead U.S. Troops Last Year

By Chas Danner and MATT STIEB

6/30/2020 INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Trump Was Reportedly Briefed on Russian Bounties for Dead U.S. Troops Last Year

By CHAS DANNER AND MATT STIEB

John Bolton reportedly briefed Trump on the Russian bounties for dead American soldiers in Afghanistan in March 2019.

6/30/2020

Another view of Trump's political bind

Photo: Nate Silver/Twitter

6/30/2020

The president's run of terrible polls continues

Two new big national polls today, similar story as others:

Pew 54-44 Biden

USA Today/Suffolk 53-41 Biden

—@kkondik

6/30/2020 VISION 2020

Trump Is Betting His Reelection on Single-Issue Statue Voters

By ERIC LEVITZ

The president ostensibly believes that — amid a pandemic and recession — swing voters' top concerns are monuments and cancel culture.

6/30/2020 PIVOT

Will the Facebook Ad Boycott Actually Change Anything?

By INTELLIGENCER STAFF

Kara Swisher and Scott Galloway discuss whether mounting pressure on the social-media behemoth is a major threat or a minor nuisance.



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