ENGL 114: The Once and Future Campus
Professor Ben Card

By submitting this essay, I attest that it is my own work, completed in accordance with University regulations. — Elias Theodore

Yale's Courtyards: Architectural Exclusion and Town-Gown Relations

by Elias Theodore '27

"Buildings are the books that everybody unconsciously reads"
—Charles B. Fairbanks (1827-1859), *My Unknown Chum*

The structures that surround us shape how we interact with space and each other. When walking through downtown New Haven, Connecticut, it is impossible not to be conscious of the difference between Yale University's campus and the rest of the city. A combination of the gothic architecture, the appearance of the people walking around, and a mysterious feeling of prosperity makes being on campus intensely different than being off. Someone looking more closely might notice the way in which Yale's buildings, for the most part, feel closed off. A great deal of them press right up against the sidewalk and don't allow entry from the street. Behind many of these buildings lie courtyards, tranquil green spaces accessible only to those with ID access. The story of Yale's courtyards, their purpose, development, and effect on the university's relationship with New Haven, could fill a book. Beginning in the late 1860s, Yale constructed new buildings and tore down old ones in order to center campus around a courtyard now known as Old Campus. This change was a pivotal step in Yale closing itself off from New Haven architecturally. As the college, later the university, expanded, particularly in building residential colleges where undergraduates live and eat their meals, Yale replicated Old Campus's courtyard style. The courtyards follow and embody the pattern of Yale shutting itself off from the city as opposed to working collaboratively to address issues. Despite Yale's efforts to offer youth programs, employ

locals, and financially support the city, these closed off green spaces are constant, physical reminders of the fraught Yale-New Haven relationship. As the university makes architectural changes, creating a more welcoming and accessible campus should be a priority.

One reason Yale chose to center itself around courtyards may have been to emulate Oxford and Cambridge, two of the world's oldest and most prestigious universities. Quadrangles or courtyards, open and often green spaces enclosed by buildings, have been components of civilizations since ancient times; Oxford and Cambridge boast some of the most famous examples. Oxford first adopted the quadrangle in 1288 with Merton College, the university's first fully self-governing constituent college.[1] Oxford has replicated the style many times and countless other institutions have taken inspiration. Courtyards are designed to provide quiet and order, to be a place to study, relax, and convene. Because the style was popularized by elite schools, courtyards have become associated with prestige, scholarliness, and excellence. Courtyards are physically exclusive in nature; they serve as a separator between insiders and outsiders. With or without these walled off spaces, elite universities are sites of exclusion. Courtyards are important physical embodiments of the elitism of universities.

[1] Britannica. "Quadrangle." Accessed November 17, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/technology/quadrangle-architecture.

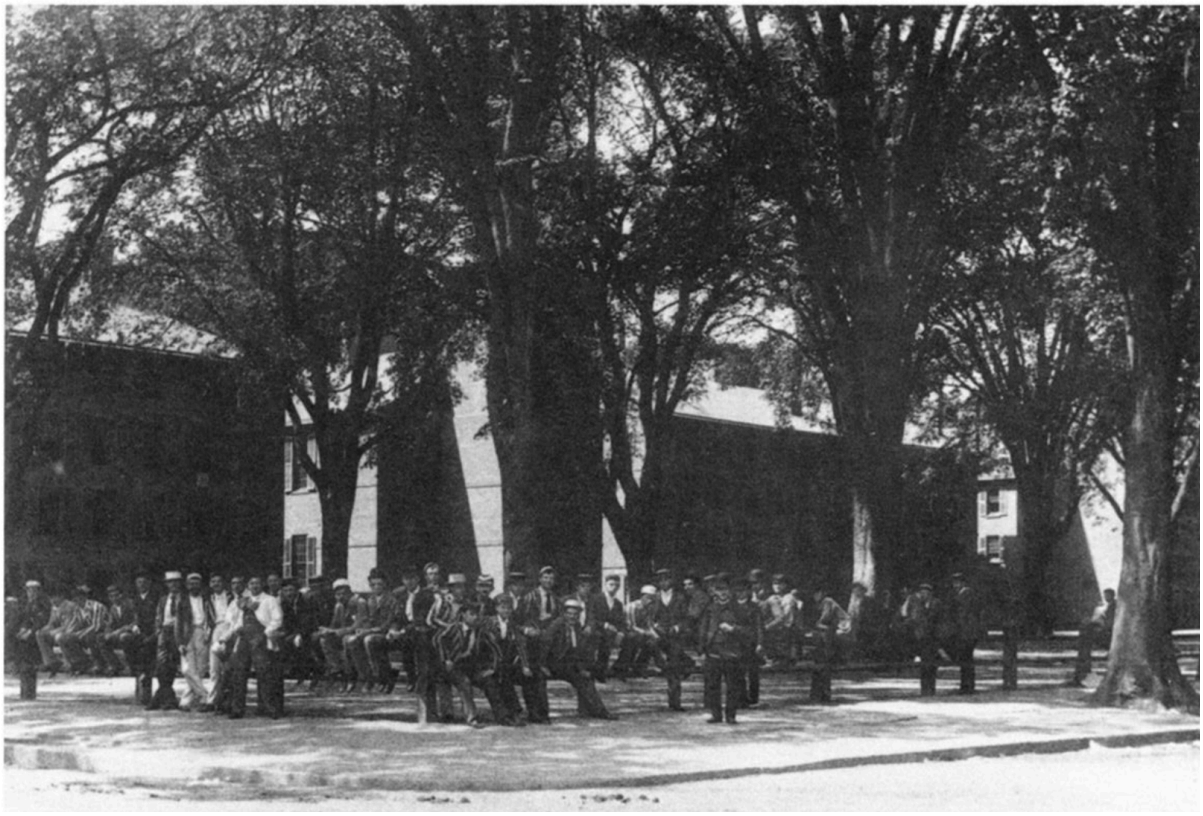

Figure 1—The Fence, 1889. Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives, YRG 48A, Cox 19, Folder 377, as cited in Guilbert, 1995.

Yale's campus did not include a courtyard until over 150 years after its inception. The college was founded in 1701 in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, a town east of New Haven. In 1718, however, the campus was relocated to New Haven.[2] At the time, Yale enrolled an estimated 36 students, who slept, ate, and studied in just one building.[3] As student enrollment rose, Yale built as needed. This unplanned expansion formed the "Old Brick Row," which was completed in 1835 with its eighth building, "Divinity College."[4] The "Old Brick Row" is distinct in its odd placement near the middle of the Old Campus grass. None of the buildings were laid close to the street, allowing for green space to be seen and used by all, Yale-associated or not. Yale's campus

[2] Yale Library. "A Brief History of Yale." Accessed November 17, 2023. https://guides.library.yale.edu/c.php?g=296245&p=1974165.
[3] George, Pierson. *A Yale Book of Numbers*, 1983, 3.
[4] *Buildings and Grounds of Yale University*, 1979.

was free flowing with the New Haven green, two adjacent blocks of grass which serve as the center of the city. The campus was surrounded by a low wooden fence, a treasured spot where students would often sit and look out upon the city.[5] In 1901, the year by which nearly all of the "Old Brick Row" was destroyed, Yale History Professor Charles Henry Smith wrote nostalgically of the campus:

> What it lacked in beauty was supplied by its surroundings. Before and behind were stretches of turf, unbroken except for the walks which crossed them. High above all spread canopies of noble elms set out in double rows. In front was the beautiful city Green with nothing to hide it from view. Far into summer, when Commencement came at the end of July or even in August, the grass and the shade and the Green were enjoyed by the students through the hot afternoons and the long evenings. Here, amid surroundings which invited sociability and community of action, and which to generations of students were as unchanging as the earth itself, customs and traditions grew and the Yale spirit was nurtured.[6]

Smith's vivid descriptions capture the open relationship between the city and campus that the "Old Brick Row" permitted. The fence was a beautiful bridge between town and gown; the way in which students sat on the outside and looked out upon the city, as shown in figure 1, invited interaction with New Haveners passing by. While Smith portrays this as a virtue, changes in the city's population and a pattern of violent interactions between students and townspeople turned this fluidity into a problem in the eyes of the university.

In her 1995 investigation into Yale campus from 1850-1920, Julliete Guilbert explores how the city's population vastly changed during the 19th century: from 1830 to 1860, the population doubled to 40,000. A significant number of Irish, German, and African Americans settled in New Haven, many of them working low-wage factory jobs. Prior to these changes, Yale students and New Haveners had much in common in terms of ethnicity, class, and religion, and

[5] See Figure 1.
[6] Smith, Charles Henry. "The Old Brick Row," 1901.

town-gown relations had been fairly smooth. According to Guilbert, these demographic changes created new tensions in New Haven, many of which affected Yale.[7]

In 1841, a riot broke out between Yale students and city firefighters on the Green, leading to a group of Yale students flipping a truck in the fire house.[8] Another fight occurred between Yalies and New Haveners in 1854, resulting in a townsperson being stabbed to death and a group of locals aiming a cannon toward Yale campus in response.[9] Four years later, a group of Yalies had a heated interaction outside the firehouse, ending with a student shooting and killing a fireman. In response, Yale gave the city $100 to move the firehouse further from campus.[10] This marks an early instance in which Yale addressed an issue with New Haven not by working collaboratively but seeking to separate itself from the city. Instead of confronting the problem and trying to reach peace between the fire department and students, the university pushed it out. That same year, the Yale Corporation ordered that "all hawkers and vendors of Newspapers, fruit and other articles, all beggars, stragglers and other persons having no right to enter the College" be kept off of campus and out of buildings.[11] The university had begun thinking in terms of insiders and outsiders.

[7] Guilbert, Juliette. "Something That Loves a Wall: The Yale University Campus, 1850-1920." *The New England Quarterly*68, no. 2 (June 1995).
[8] Guilbert, "Something That Loves," 265.
[9] Yale Alumni Magazine. "Highs and Lows of Town and Gown," March 2001.
[10] Guilbert, "Something That Loves," 265.
[11] Yale College Register, vol. 2, Corporation Minutes, July 1858, Yale University microform, HM 49, reel 3, pp. 459, 453. Yale College Corporation Prudential Committee Minutes, 12 July 1860, microform, HM 50, reel 1, p. 60, Yale Manuscripts and Archives, as cited in Guilbert, 1995.

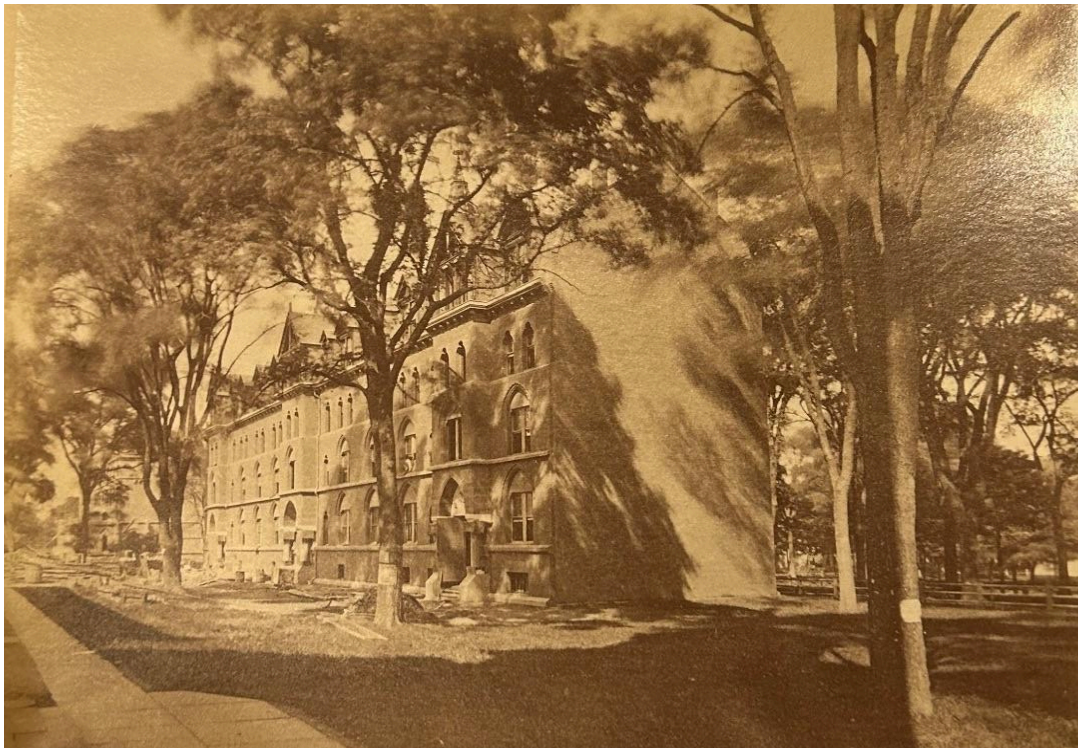

Figure 2—Farnam Hall soon after construction. Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives, RU 1, Series 1, Folder 12.

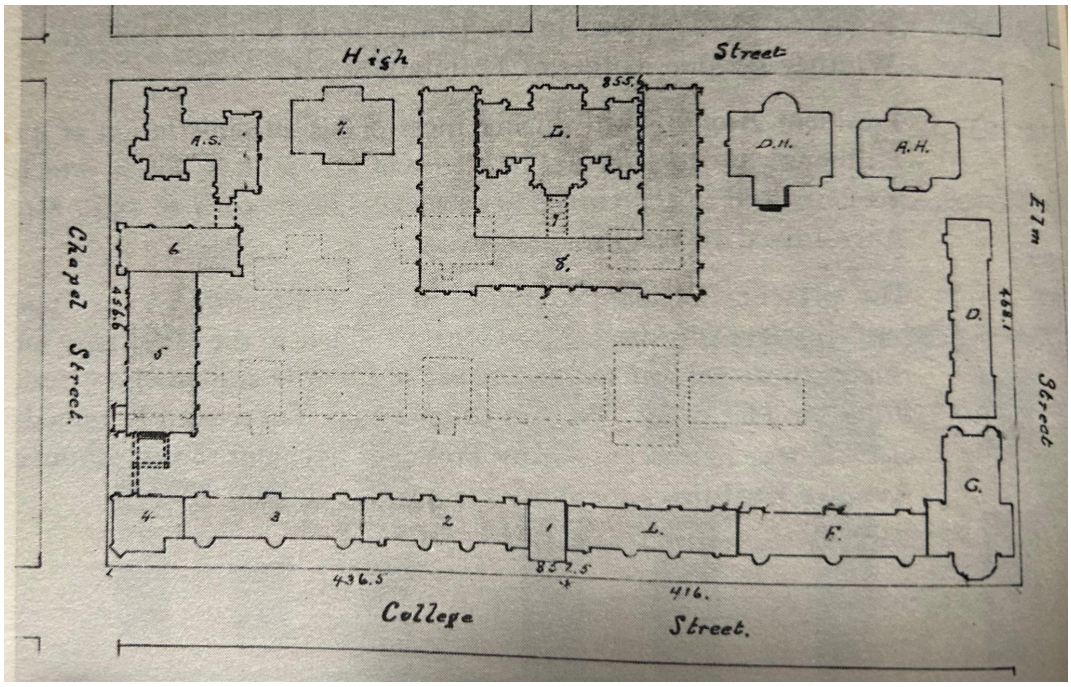

Figure 3—Plan for Old Campus showing present and projected buildings, attributed to William W. Farnam, Treasurer of Yale University, ca. 1887-1888, as cited in *Buildings and Grounds of Yale University*, 1979.

In this context, Yale proposed the building of Farnam Hall in the late 1860s, beginning a fundamental change to campus. The significance of Farnam, designed by Russel Sturgis, is in its placement.[12] Unlike the structures of the "Old Brick Row," which sat in the middle of an open lawn, Farnam was set right up against College Street. In addition, the building could not be accessed from the street; the only doors faced the "Old Brick Row." Farnam looks strangely out of place in photos taken shortly after it was built: the building stands on its own, its sides are windowless, and its grounds around appear carelessly kept.[13] What these features indicate is that Farnam was just the start; it was joined by Durfee Hall in 1871 and Battell Chapel in 1874, which were also designed by Sturgis. Durfee lined Elm Street, and like Farnam, all of Durfee's doors face the courtyard. Battell filled in the corner of Elm and College; the chapel's main entrance does not face the street. Figure 3, a map from the late 1880s that charted out the future of Old Campus, shows that the college now had an architectural vision: to close itself off from the city by forming a courtyard. Over the 30 years following Sturgis' trio of buildings, Yale executed this vision, constructing Lawrence, Welch, Osborn (later replaced by Bingham) and Phelps Halls, all of which were built right up against their respective streets. A historian quoted in the Yale archives wrote of Phelps: "the gatehouse form turns the entire Old Campus into a single great courtyard, a bold idea and logical completion of a scheme implied when Farnam Hall was built."[14] Once the scheme was realized, Farnam no longer looked out of place. As these structures rapidly went up, the old buildings they surrounded swiftly came down. In a plan from the 1880s attributed to William Farnam (figure 3), the buildings of the original "Old Brick Row"

[12] *Buildings and Grounds of Yale University*, 1979.
[13] See Figure 2.
[14] Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives, RU 1, Folder 19.

are depicted as dotted lines. By 1901, seven of them had been torn down and only one remained, Connecticut Hall, which still stands today.[15]

This switch to a courtyard influenced Yale's future architecture, shapes how students and townspeople experience the city, and contributes to and physically embodies Yale and New Haven's fraught town-gown relationship. In 1919, the university, beginning to think about long term campus growth, commissioned American architect James Russell Pope to design a 100 year plan of expansion for the university. His ambitious proposal prioritized architectural harmony between the old and new and featured publicly open squares that created a feeling of monumentalism.[16] The building pattern the university chose to carry out, unlike Pope's plan, was centered around inward-facing buildings and courtyards. In rejecting Pope's proposal, the University Committee expressed their desire to close off campus in areas ripe with New Haven businesses:

> We are especially inclined to recommend the adoption of the principle of enclosed quadrangles for all plans relating to the property south of Grove Street, believing that this property is now, or soon will be, in the business part of New Haven, and that in this section college life should be secluded by such enclosures.[17]

For some, such city developments would be a reason for the university to open up campus, to integrate itself more closely with a booming part of the town. For Yale administrators, however, a growing business district near campus necessitated enclosure. Yale's choice suggests the university had a snobbish distaste towards the world of affectcommerce, seeing it as "beneath" the concerns of academia (recall the banning of hawkers and vendors in 1858). This is one moment in the pattern of Yale not embracing surrounding New Haven. In the next paragraph, the

[15] See Figure 3.
[16] Yale Manuscripts and Archives Blog. "John Russell Pope and the Unrealized Yale Campus Plan," August 7, 2013.
[17] The Yale University Committee on the Architectural Plan. Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives, RU 30, Box 1.

administration notes that for property north of Grove Street, "a more open treatment could be followed," given that "traffic is not likely to be that of a business nature." This suggests that Yale was only attached to the courtyard style in certain circumstances; business, to them, threatened campus peace.[18]

The Memorial Quadrangle, which became Branford and Saybrook Colleges in 1933, was completed in 1921 and features six courtyards.[19] In a speech celebrating the opening of the buildings, Yale President James Rowland Angell spoke of seclusion as educationally and socially beneficial:

> It will be our grateful task, so far as in us lies, to safeguard for future generations the inner spirit of the Quadrangle: to keep it a place where joyfully soul of youth may open out into the full flower of sturdy manhood, where enabling companionship may flourish, where hope and aspiration and high resolve may find congenial abode.[20]

Angell argues that for students to "open out" and realize their full potential, the University must close itself off from the outside world. Given Angell's affection towards courtyards, it is not shocking that many more were constructed during his 16 year presidency. In the early 1930s, administrators worried the college was heading in a dangerous direction: many students lived off campus and were members of fraternities and eating clubs; there was a sense that students had become rowdy, ill-mannered, and disconnected from the college.[21] Implicit in these concerns is a negative view of New Haven: the university believed students needed to be brought back more

[18] In the late 1990s, Yale realized that university regulated business could be an asset. Yale entered the New Haven commercial real estate market in a major way, purchasing a number of buildings on Broadway. Since then, the university has been a landlord and transformed the area. One could see these real estate ventures as Yale opening up to and supporting growth in the city. But for the most part, what Yale has done is drive out family-owned businesses in favor of chains like Urban Outfitters, J. Crew, and L.L. Bean. Broadway is now a bourgeois shopping experience for tourists and prospective families and an expansion of the University's dominance over the city. Yale Professor Elihu Rubin explored these tensions in his short film "On Broadway: A New Haven Streetscape." (https://americanbeat.org/On-Broadway-A-New-Haven-Streetscape)

[19] Ryan, Susan. *Yale Courtyards*, n.d.

[20] Angell, James Rowland. "Speech at the Memorial Quadrangle." December 11, 1920. Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives, RU 24, Box 98, Folder 1000.

[21] Author's conversation with Bill Landis. Education Program Director, Yale Library, November 8, 2023.

closely to Yale and away from the city in order to become civilized. Charles Seymour, the university Provost at the time, published an essay expressing these concerns and presenting the solution: residential colleges.[22] The first seven colleges, Branford, Calhoun, Davenport, Jonathan Edwards, Pierson, Saybrook, and Trumbull, opened in 1933.[23] Courtyards were central to each of their designs. As on Old Campus, dormitories in the residential colleges are accessible only from the inside. The building of these colleges transformed downtown New Haven, and seven more have been added since; in all, they take up a significant amount of land. Green space in downtown New Haven is meager—much of it is owned and enclosed by Yale, meaning only those with ID access are able to use it. The New Haven Green, the city's largest open space, has become a troubling display of the city's poverty and homelessness.[24] It is striking to think that in the blocks that surround it, Yale courtyards provide a select few a serene, comforting outdoor space.

In the late 1950s, Yale had a chance to abandon this practice of architecturally isolating residential colleges when they commissioned Eero Saarinen to design Ezra Stiles and Morse Colleges, the eleventh and twelfth residential colleges. Saarinen's neo-futurist approach was a notable departure from tradition: all of the prior residential colleges had been built in neo gothic or Georgian styles, intended to look much older than they actually were. Yet despite this radical shift in style, a courtyard for each college was an integral part of Saarinen's design.[25] Stiles and Morse solidified the fundamental parts of a residential college: a dining hall, a grand house for the head of college, a buttery, a gym, and a courtyard. These two colleges are on the west end of

[22] Seymour, Charles. "History of the College Plan." *The Yale Alumni Weekly* 43, no. 13 (December 22, 1933).
[23] Schiff, Judith. "How the Colleges Were Born." *Yale Alumni Magazine*, June 2008.
[24] Breen, Thomas. "Three Tents Pop Up On The Green." *New Haven Independent*, August 30, 2023.
[25] Ezra Stiles College. "About Ezra Stiles: A Brief History." Accessed November 17, 2023.

Yale's campus and border Broadway. By closing them off in this manner, Yale reiterated the statement they made nearly 30 years prior: space open to the city did not foster the community, peace, and learning that they hoped would come from residential colleges.

Yale's gradual adoption of courtyards has served as a detriment to fostering a collaborative and open relationship between the university and the city, the students and the townspeople. In a 2022 article, Dustin Copeland, an undergraduate at Amherst College, interrogates the history and exclusionary nature of courtyards at elite universities. He cites that Yale's 2022 spending budget was $4.27 billion, compared to New Haven's mere $704 million. Copeland writes:

> Colleges are not the places they are located in… they function as completely separate entities, as if they truly are educational oases, far from civilization. A college quadrangle is a…space held and used exclusively by the privileged few, while remaining off-limits for most. Yale's Gothic spires look like castle walls in a way that becomes literal on some level to both students and outsiders. Amherst College is up on a hill, and its quadrangle, too, is a space exclusive to only those of us who "deserve" to be here.[26]

Copeland's article captures the power of architectural choices in dividing a college and its host city. Yale is *not* New Haven by its own doing: the university often responds to conflicts with or changes in the city by designing exclusionary architecture, donating money, or increasing security instead of working collaboratively to improve the relationship. Today, the university has a robust office of New Haven affairs focused on supporting the public schools, hiring local residents, partnering with community organizations, and more.[27] But courtyards are constant physical reminders of who is deserving of access and who is not. No amount of youth programs, millions of dollars in donations to the city, or New Haveners hired will erase the continued damage that Yale has done by closing itself off architecturally.

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[26] Copeland, Dustin. "Coping With Campus: The Isolationism of the Quad." *The Amherst Student*, February 9, 2022.
[27] "Initiatives | Office of New Haven Affairs." Accessed November 17, 2023. https://onha.yale.edu/initiatives.

I grew up in New Haven and am now a first year at Yale College. Throughout my life, I've heard anecdotes from teachers, peers, and strangers about how unwelcome they feel on and around Yale campus. This manifests in different ways: anger, a lack of confidence in one's intelligence, pessimism towards the town-gown relationship, and skepticism when the university does try to open itself up. I feel strongly that architecture is one of the foundational ways the university feels inaccessible. In my few months as a Yale student, I've been asked countless times if I feel safe in New Haven, for advice on which neighborhoods to avoid, and about what it was like growing up here. Inwardly facing dorms and the stark contrast between being in a Yale courtyard versus being on the Green fuel worries about the city and questions like these. I answer them honestly, and encourage people to give New Haven a chance: have a conversation with someone on the streets, get engaged with the city government, volunteer at the public schools. Recognize the beauty and value in going to college in an American city with real urban problems. I wish that throughout the university's history, that was the message promoted and acted upon.

In her 2015 essay "Architectural Exclusion: Discrimination and Segregation through Physical Design of the Built Environment," Sarah B. Schindler explores how a place's exclusionary built environment serves as a way to regulate and segregate. She cites the "walls, gates, and guardhouses of gated communities" as one of the most "obvious forms of architectural exclusion."[28] Residential colleges are the university's gated communities. Downtown New Haven is packed with these unwelcoming structures; Yale and the city both suffer. Schindler goes on to talk about legal forms of redress for architectural exclusion. While it's hard to imagine Yale

[28] Sarah B. Schindler, *Architectural Exclusion: Discrimination and Segregation through Physical Design of the Built Environment*, 124 Yale L. J. 1934 (2015).

being charged for discriminatory architecture, Schindler's essay demands thinking about what should be done moving forward.

With a radical approach to campus development and through collaborative partnership, I believe colleges *can* be the places they are located. Davarian L. Baldwin's *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower* explores many sites of broken town-gown relationships. He ends, however, by describing the campus development and community partnership happening at the University of Winnipeg in Canada. In the early 2000s, the university experienced a demographic shift from local, standard college age commuters toward First Nation citizens and immigrants who had families. This population needed non-traditional housing and support. For the first time, the university embraced the impoverished indigenous area that surrounded it, building subsidized housing for community members taking classes anywhere in the city. The common area of the buildings is publicly accessible and built in order to hold indigenous smudging ceremonies.[29] The university also built the Axworthy Health and RecPlex, a massive indoor sports and recreation facility designed to be used by anyone in the area, even those not affiliated with the university.[30] Baldwin was deeply impressed. Yale and the University of Winnipeg have vastly different histories, student bodies, and goals as institutions. Regardless, Yale can learn from the thoughtful way in which the University of Winnipeg opened itself up to its local community. I am not proposing for Yale to tear down Old Campus and the residential colleges. I think it is outside of Yale's scope and goals to offer local families subsidized housing and attendance. But I hope that in considering the relationship between Yale and New Haven, architectural exclusion is considered more frequently. Most importantly, Yale's pattern of closing itself off from the city in

[29] Baldwin, Davarian L. *In The Shadow of the Ivory Tower*. New York: Hachette Book Group, Inc., 2021, 197-205.
[30] "Axworthy Health & RecPlex | Event Services | The University of Winnipeg." Accessed November 17, 2023. https://www.uwinnipeg.ca/event-services/venue-options/recplex.html.

times of conflict must end. As the university inevitably updates and expands its campus, making the architecture more inclusive and inviting should be a priority.

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