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## Critical Perspectives on Our Current Moment: An Experiment in Teaching for 2020

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## BIOS

**JANE EVA BAXTER, PHD**, is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Anthropology. She began teaching at DePaul in 2000 and won the LAS Excellence in Teaching Award the first year she was eligible in 2003. During her career at DePaul, she has published three books, edited five volumes, and written over thirty peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on topics including archaeological pedagogies, the archaeology of childhood, emotions in the past, historic cemetery studies, and the archaeology of labor and identity.

**SARAH BROWN** is the assistant director of faculty development and instructional technology in DePaul's Center for Teaching and Learning. She collaborates with stakeholders in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences on programmatic initiatives, and she facilitates faculty development programs, such as the DePaul Online Teaching Series. She also teaches in the Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse department.

**JENICEL CARMONA** is a first-year student at DePaul University. She intends to study applied diplomacy and political science. For the course Critical Perspectives on Our Current Moment, she created a map featuring music and art connected to the substance of the course material.

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**VAL CARNES** is a freshman at DePaul University majoring in political science and is participating in the JD 3/3 program. They are also minoring in classical studies and history.

**ZOE ESPINOSA** is a freshman at DePaul University. She is set to graduate as a part of the honors program in 2023 because her major is joined to participation in the JD 3/3 program. She is currently majoring in English with a concentration in creative writing and after her graduation will be attending DePaul's law school. She is grateful for the opportunities DePaul has given her.

**RANDALL HONOLD, PHD**, is assistant dean for academic services in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. In addition to his work leading academic advising efforts for LAS, Honold has served as vice president of DePaul's Staff Council and on the board of directors of NACADA. He also teaches courses in philosophy and environmental studies.

**CARY ROBBINS** is excited to be attending DePaul University as a freshman. She hopes to live on campus soon and to continue pursuing her major in peace, justice, and conflict studies.

**GEORGE SLAD** is a freshman attending DePaul University. He is majoring in English and minoring in film production, and he lives in New Mexico. Because both of his parents were born and raised in Chicago, he has visited the city many times for leisure.

**MARGARET STOREY, PHD**, is professor of history and associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at DePaul University. She received her PhD in United States history from Emory University in 1999 and has published books and articles about the American South during the Civil War. Her most recent article, "War's Domestic Corollary: Union Occupation Households in the Civil War South," appeared in the edited collection *From Home Front to Battlefield: The Civil War as a Household War* in 2019.

## **An Introduction**

**D**uring the summer of 2020, the DePaul College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (LAS) offered a small group of newly admitted students the opportunity to learn and reflect with faculty, staff, and one another about topics that were dominating our lives in a year frequently and aptly described as unprecedented.<sup>1</sup> The experience centered on a two-credit hour course that took place over a five-week period with an academic and a co-curricular synchronous online meeting each week. To document this experience as part of DePaul 2020, a small group of the faculty, staff, and student participants came together to describe the formulation and execution of this course and to offer reflection on the student experience. This unique educational experience built on DePaul's particular strengths as a teaching institution and its mission to educate students in ways that engage questions of intellect and ethics in our contemporary world. The most significant and enduring feature of this work, we hope, is the presentation of projects and reflections by students who participated in this course so that their voices may be recorded as part of our DePaul 2020 experiences.

### **Creating a Course for Our Current Moment**

Margaret Storey

For many of us, March 2020 was a crash course in unimagined contingencies. Facing the sudden, dramatic demands of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of our certainties (imagined or otherwise) were challenged. How would we live and work? Where would we live and work? For how long? What would this public health crisis mean for the near term? The long term?

In higher education, we faced our own list of uncertainties: how would our faculty adapt to the demand to move rapidly and completely to online instruction? How would our students meet the moment? What would they need, and would we be able to deliver? Would our enrollments for next year hold, and how could we recruit students remotely? In short, what was possible in this new reality?

In LAS, we felt confident about a few things amid this confusion. We knew we were a teaching institution with exceptionally talented faculty who are deeply committed to our students, that we had one of the best models of online instruction in the country, and that

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of various efforts undertaken for students by LAS in the summer of 2020, see: *Insights: LAS College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences* (Fall 2020): 4–5. *Insights* can be accessed here: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/insights/>.

there is nothing like interdisciplinary, critical inquiry to help navigate crises like the ones we were facing.

To that end, we began in April to work with our Office of Admissions to plan a special summer course for a small group of newly admitted students, ISP 330: Critical Perspectives on Our Current Moment. Our goal was to help our newest students to use the insights of the liberal arts and sciences to contextualize, explain, and put in perspective the extraordinary changes they were living through, while also gaining academic advising support as they prepared for the fall quarter.

The course would be online, led by an award-winning professor, Dr. Jane Eva Baxter, and supported by a team of ten contributing faculty who would explore topics like the social contract; equity and justice; historical, cultural, and artistic responses to upheaval; global interconnections; and the way forward. Complementing the academic content would be a robust introduction to student support experts and services at DePaul, led by our Assistant Dean Randall Honold.

Our course planning was complete when, in late May, the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis brought into high relief the racism that has long marred policing in the US, prompting widespread protests and renewed calls for change under the Black Lives Matter banner. Nonetheless, because of the course's interdisciplinary structure, it was primed to be space in which our students could explore the larger historical, political, and social contexts of Floyd's death, alongside the crises prompted by the pandemic.

Saint Vincent de Paul's injunction of "What must be done?" is at the heart of our work in LAS. But action not informed by knowledge and understanding can be ineffective, at best, and reckless and harmful at worst. For us, the summer mini-course was one of the things that we could do to make a difference in the lives and education of our students. As their final reflective maps demonstrate, our students were empowered not only to think differently, but to imagine their own field of action in new ways too. We can think of no better way to start college.

## **Developing Academic Content**

Jane Eva Baxter

When I was first asked to undertake the facilitation of this course, the content had already been determined. Weekly topics had been established and amazing colleagues from across the college had agreed to give their time freely to engage with our incoming students. I was asked to lead the student experience as a facilitator for two reasons. First, I had been

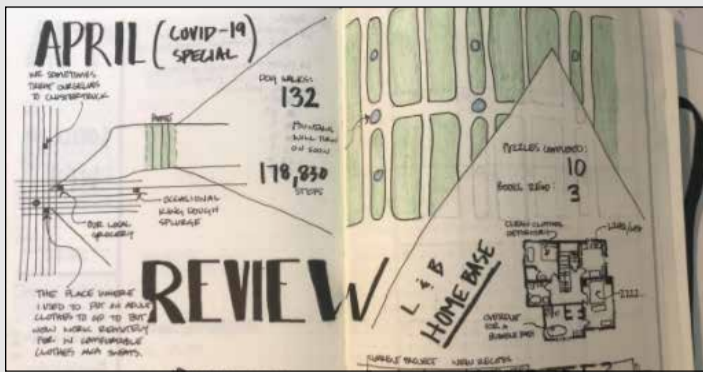
teaching most of my courses online for years, and I was very comfortable and familiar with developing pedagogies and facilitating learning for online students. Second, in my own scholarly life as a historical archaeologist, I regularly work across disciplinary boundaries and it was thought I could translate my own experiences in interdisciplinary research and thinking into an effective learning structure for student engagement.

The course that was developed had the following topics and participants:

- The Social Contract in Our Current Moment  
Dr. Molly Andolina (Political Science) and Dr. Winfred Curran (Geography)
- Equity and Justice in a Time of Pandemic  
Dr. Christina Rivers (Political Science) and Dr. Daniel Schoeber (Masters in Public Health)
- The Past and Its Lessons  
Dr. Rachel Scott (Anthropology) and Dr. Chernoh Sesay (Religious Studies)
- Artists and Writers in Moments of Upheaval  
Dr. Delia Constantino (Art History), Dr. Rebecca Cameron (English), and Prof. Matthew Girson (Art and Digital Media)
- Global Interconnections and the Paths Forward  
Dr. Susana Martinez (Modern Languages), and Dr. David Wellman (Grace School of Applied Diplomacy)

Facilitating a course where you aren't developing the weekly content is a trickier endeavor than I could have ever imagined. Certainly, I did not have to develop the materials and lessons, but I did have to provide a sense of an overarching course and some pedagogical continuity. The tradeoff for this challenge was being treated to an extraordinary educational experience in the liberal arts. Socially distancing during pandemic lockdowns and restrictions meant I was spending a great deal of time with my own thoughts. Patterns and ideas grew stale and wearisome, and this course injected fresh new thinking into my socially distanced world each week, giving me new ways to engage information, challenge my thinking, and examine the complexities of our current world with greater understanding and hope. I was an eager student!

My role each week was largely administrative. I welcomed the class, helped field questions for speakers, made sure technology was working before and during presentations, and encouraged and acknowledged student participation in the chat feature on Zoom. I also sometimes chimed in with my own disciplinary insights on a topic of conversation, and I



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**Figures 1a and 1b: Two different maps submitted to Citylab. Both are examples of maps categorized as Domestic Rearrangements and were submitted by: Lora Teagarden of Indianapolis Indiana (top); and An Trinh from Haiphong, Vietnam (bottom).**

See: <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-coronavirus-lockdown-neighborhood-maps/>

Courtesy of the authors



made a point to ask our speakers at the end of each session to share with us what made them hopeful during these very difficult times. These final responses were often inspiring and uplifting after some very challenging conversations, and sometimes suggested ways students could participate in creating hopeful futures through engaging the Vincentian question of “What must be done?”

My greater contribution to the course was creating a reflective project for students that allowed them to engage the course content in ways that were simultaneously personal, collective, intellectual, and emotional. This project was inspired by the *Bloomberg CityLab*’s request for readers to submit handmade maps of their lives under quarantine.<sup>2</sup> The request from CityLab was simple: they asked people to create a map that illustrated their changed relationships to their neighborhood as a result of the coronavirus. The response was rather incredible as over 400 people from around the world submitted handmade maps.<sup>3</sup> Artistically, these included digital art projects, collages, sketches, paintings, and even a Washington DC Metro Map recreated in multicolored pepper strips on a frozen pizza. People depicted changing relationships in ways CityLab characterized as, Domestic Rearrangements, Natural Callings, Psychic Landscapes, Neighborhood Bonds, Redefined

<sup>2</sup> Laura Bliss and Jessica Martin, “Readers: Share Your Hand-Made Maps of Life Under Lockdown,” *Bloomberg*, 3 April 2020, at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-03/share-your-hand-made-maps-of-life-under-quarantine>.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Bliss and Jessica Lee Martin, “How 2020 Remapped Your Worlds,” *Bloomberg*, 18 June 2020, see: <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-coronavirus-lockdown-neighborhood-maps/>.



Boundaries, and Virtual Connections (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> In viewing these maps, I realized the potential to create a unique reflective project for students in the form of reflective learning maps.

The directions for these reflective projects required students to make a physical map using whatever materials they preferred, but the map needed to be a material project involving posterboard, written text, clipped images, or art supplies in any combination they desired. With life becoming increasingly digital, the idea of a multi-sensory, tactile project was particularly appealing to me as a way to engage students. The CityLab project was provided as reference and inspiration. I also encouraged students in the assignment directions to think of the idea of a map broadly including both tangible and intangible elements. There needed to be a starting point, but the routes and connections they mapped would, as the assignment sheet noted, “not generally be physical places but instead will allow you to visually demonstrate the intellectual, social, and emotional connections that are being created as you reflect on your learning journey.”

These maps needed to be updated on a weekly basis, meaning the relationships expressed on the map might get messy and complicated, and that was encouraged. Weekly updates of student projects were posted to Instagram using a course-specific hashtag so instructors and students could see how each reflection was evolving. The completed projects were presented as videos where students provided a narrative audio tour of their reflective maps. Five student projects were selected for this publication and appear below in a presentation format that mirrors those in the CityLab publication,<sup>5</sup> particularly a selected image or images combined with a written explanation to help guide the reader through the map. It is hoped that these exceptional examples from a collection of truly excellent student work will help readers appreciate the experiences of DePaul students in 2020.

## **The Co-Curricular Component**

Randall Honold

When this course was conceived, we wanted it to have a co-curricular component that complimented the academic activities designed by the lead instructor and the faculty contributors. We thought it was important to give the students a sense of how study in LAS is connected to what the university can offer them outside of the classroom. After some

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4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

discussion about what this might look like, I was asked to develop a series of five, one-hour sessions on Thursdays that would follow each Tuesday's two-hour meeting led by faculty. I designed the co-curricular component to mirror the topic of that week's academic session, then asked staff professional colleagues from across the university to make the presentations. The idea was to scale the curriculum, focused on macro, systemic issues, down to the level of the DePaul community, in order to introduce the students to the institutional resources, supports, and opportunities we make available for them. All of the people I asked to contribute were enthusiastic about the opportunity.

I moderated the sessions; the topics and presenters were as follows:

- Week One: The DePaul Social Contract  
Yessenia Mejia, College Transitions Coordinator, Office of Multicultural Student Success
- Week Two: Health & Wellness at DePaul  
Katrina Wagner, Health Promotion Coordinator, Office of Health Promotion and Wellness
- Week Three: Who We Were, Who We Are, and Whom We Might Become  
Tim Mazurek, Associate Director, Office for Academic Advising Support
- Week Four: DePaul's Writing Center and Art Museum  
Katie Martin, Workshops & Digital Resources Coordinator, University Center for Writing-based Learning  
Laura-Caroline de Lara Johnson, Interim Director, DePaul Art Museum
- Week Five: Global Engagement and Career Exploration  
Marty McGivern, Director, Study Abroad Program  
Hilarie Longnecker, Associate Director of Early Engagement, Career Center

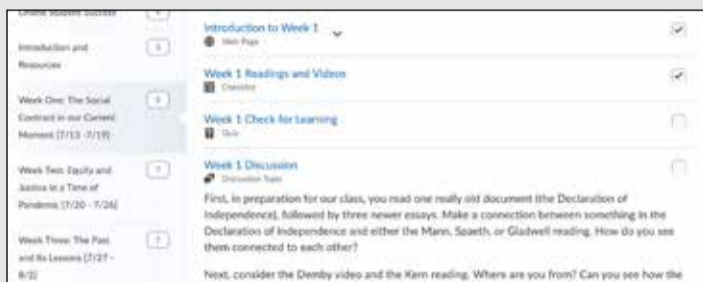
Whenever possible, I sat in on the Tuesday sessions. This afforded me some language to make smooth transitions from the academic to the co-curricular topics and to frame the two components of the course as connected in both idea and practice. My colleagues did all the work in the sessions, really. They calibrated their presentations to their audience wonderfully. Students were as engaged on Thursdays as they were on Tuesdays. While the academic presentations were the "head" of the course, the co-curricular sessions were its "heart."



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**Figures 2a and 2b: Images from the course *Desire to Learn (D2L)* illustrating how each week was presented to students, thereby creating a uniform set of activities and expectations.**

*Courtesy of the authors*



## Developing the Course as a Remote Offering

Sarah Brown

When Associate Dean Margaret Storey reached out to me with the idea for *Critical Perspectives on Our Current Moment*, my enthusiasm for the proposal propelled me into strategy immediately: How could we craft a course that engages unique disciplinary lenses and yet still has a clear through line? What pedagogical and design elements were necessary to create a productive learning experience? And most importantly, how would we complete such an ambitious project on a tight timeline?

As many instructors will tell you, teaching collaboratively is just as much of a challenge, if not more so, than crafting and executing a course individually. Fortunately, in addition to being disciplinary experts, our faculty team also brought a wealth of instructional experience, and critically, they were willing to work as a team to deliver content and foster learning using the same structure. This ensured that students didn't feel like they were walking into a different (virtual) classroom each week, and it allowed them to focus all of their mental energy on the new ideas and ways of thinking they were encountering, rather than getting distracted by the logistics of the course.

The weekly design structure asked faculty to produce four elements (Figure 2):

- *Course materials*: Faculty provided readings, podcasts, and videos to introduce students to their disciplinary lens, and they worked with the guidelines established by Drs. Storey and Baxter to ensure that each week had a similar amount of reading, listening, and watching.

- *Knowledge-check quizzes:* Each faculty member wrote five multiple-choice questions to help students affirm their understanding of the course materials prior to the synchronous session. This might not seem like a big ask, but for most of our faculty, quizzes aren't a common method for assessing learning, and because their readings were designed to prompt complex conversations, it was often a challenge to come with a set of questions with objectively right or wrong answers.
- *Discussions:* We wanted the asynchronous discussion to help students begin unpacking ideas that they could engage with further in the synchronous sessions. The weekly faculty teams collaborated to create meaningful prompts that guided students towards finding points of synthesis in the course materials.
- *Synchronous Sessions:* Finally, faculty members planned the materials for our academic synchronous session on Tuesdays, where they would provide further information to build on the online learning. Our limited time in Zoom was made more fruitful by the online work students had done in preparation.

Even though the structure for each week introduced some constraints for the faculty, it also provided a clear task list for the instructors to complete in the limited time available to design the course. By designing within the planned framework for the course, the faculty team delivered a clear and consistent learning experience for the students, and their projects demonstrate that they were able to focus their discovery and reflection on the course materials.

## **Student Perspectives and Reflections**

This course was a unique creation and therefore didn't fall under the typical rubrics and patterns of standardized university course evaluations. Instead, an exit survey was offered to students after the completion of the course, and five of the twenty-two participants chose to share their perspectives. While a small sample, their feedback on the experience was very consistent. Students reported that the summer course gave them a greater sense of being prepared to begin their classes in the autumn, both in terms of systems and technologies and how professors conducted university-level classes. Similarly, the co-curricular component was reported to be highly influential, both in increasing confidence for the transition to college life and also allowing students to imagine new ways they could engage in an academic setting using the resources at DePaul.

The course participants also commented enthusiastically on the course's interdisciplinary structure and content. They cited the importance of having each week offer new perspectives that challenged their thinking, increased their understanding through exposure to previously unfamiliar disciplines, and provided opportunities to dive deeply



[Click to enlarge](#)

**Figure 3: The reflective map of Val Carnes created as their final ISP 300 project.**

*Courtesy of the authors*

into the complexity of our current moment. Students commented on changed perspectives, the ability to think more deeply, recognizing the interconnectedness of ideas and events, and a sense of empowerment to look for solutions they might implement in their own life and in their futures.

The final question of the exit survey asked students if the course had strengthened their relationship to DePaul. All agreed that it had helped them gain a deeper appreciation for the university, for the faculty, and for fellow students, and others noted it had reinforced their choice of DePaul and increased their excitement to start their freshman year. As one respondent said, “I think the course made my relationship stronger, and it showed me that I am going where I am supposed to be.”

While these universally positive anecdotal responses to an exit survey suggest the course was a good idea in a challenging moment, the reflective work of the students is a more powerful testament to the impact of the course. The following five student contributions represent the very best of an excellent collection of student works and help to give voice to the experience of DePaul students as we navigated a very difficult summer in the middle of the very difficult year that was 2020.<sup>6</sup> Each contribution is personal and unique, and none is representative of “the student experience,” but collectively they illustrate the variety of ways students found meaning, explored ideas, and grew in the midst of this unprecedented year.

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<sup>6</sup> The student exit surveys were anonymous. The student posters were selected by the course instructor. While there are five students in each group, there is no way of determining whether or not there was overlap between those providing exit survey responses and those chosen to contribute their work to this chapter.

### ***Student Reflection—Val Carnes***

Given the challenge of making a map, I decided to make it in rings (Figure 3). I've never had a very good sense of direction. As a result, I tend to think of everything in terms of how far away they are from a central location rather than where they are in space. I can get to the mailbox from my house, but if I'm asked where it is, all I'll be able to say is "about ten minutes that way," possibly punctuated with me pointing in the general direction of which way I need to walk. The nearest restaurants are "about five minutes this way," my old elementary school is "ten minutes with a few turns," and so on. A map of my thoughts is similar. Even if I don't know exactly how I got from thought to thought, I know how far I've gone from where I started.

In the center of my map, therefore, is home. It's a tiny, Monopoly-like representation of a house. Nothing fancy. It's just where I started, mentally speaking, like when you set the tare on your scale in a physical laboratory. In the same layer is a drawing of me (mostly to set up what I look like for future drawings) and some Z's, because that week was the week I was starting to develop a more consistent sleep schedule.

From this point on, every ring represented one week of the summer. The next ring sees me slowly wading into the idea of online classes: I'm nervously meeting people on the bottom, starting to read things on the right, and on top I'm in a Zoom call. There's also a plate and a cup of liquid, because in terms of self-care I focused on trying to establish a regular schedule of eating meals and drinking water.

In week 3, the third ring from the center, I really started to express what was going on in my life at the time. In class, we were learning about how scientists were dealing with the virus. Nothing was more inspiring to me than hearing that scientists all over the world were united in their pursuit of finding a vaccine. That came at a time when I absolutely needed it and really stirred something in me a lot more than I was expecting. It helped to balance out the other, less positive events of the week: finally cutting off contact with someone I needed to get away from, feeling very small as time got harder and harder to keep track of, and generally feeling very lost. On the bright side, I took some lovely evening walks (in the top left) and got some socks (in the bottom right). Always a pleasure.

Following the melting clocks through the broken part of the ring, you can see that time was a bit hard to keep track of between weeks 3 and 4. Those two weeks in particular really seemed to blend together. In week 4, I nearly drew several things that had happened the previous week because quarantine was making it so difficult for me to tell time. There were definitely some distinctive events that week, though: besides drinking a lot more caffeine (top left), both lectures absolutely fascinated me. The one on the bottom was one about plagues over the ages and their connection to the modern day. I was particularly

interested in the tone the professor used to describe old catastrophes, as cheerfully as if she'd been describing the weather. The other lecture, about memorials (top), left me thinking all week what sort of memorial I'd want to design. I'm still not sure I have an answer to that. Memorials are so open-ended, and they're such an interesting problem to try to get right. How do you efficiently and effectively communicate your respect for a situation without using your funding frivolously? What's "just enough" detail to put in a monument without going overboard? I discussed these frequently with my brother, pictured on the bottom right, who watched the lecture with me.

Finally, in the last ring, I demonstrated what I'd learned from the whole class. In the bottom right is a sketch of a painting we analyzed. The same painting is depicted more crudely in the top left. It's one that I also gave quite a bit of thought. The top left depicts my setup when I figured out how I could best analyze it: have one screen for listening to the professor and one for opening the painting in Photoshop, marking it up. I circled important details, scribbled some notes on it, that sort of thing. It was a lovely painting, and one with quite a bit of detail put into it. Below the setup drawing on the left is me being observed by a group of eyes. This represents me being intimately aware of how many eyes were on me. I posted updates on my project progress on Instagram, a program I've never been very familiar with, and occasionally received likes and comments! I also found myself thinking about being watched because of the strange and unique time we're living in. Undeniably, what we do now will end up in the history books, because nothing like this will happen again for a very long time (hopefully).

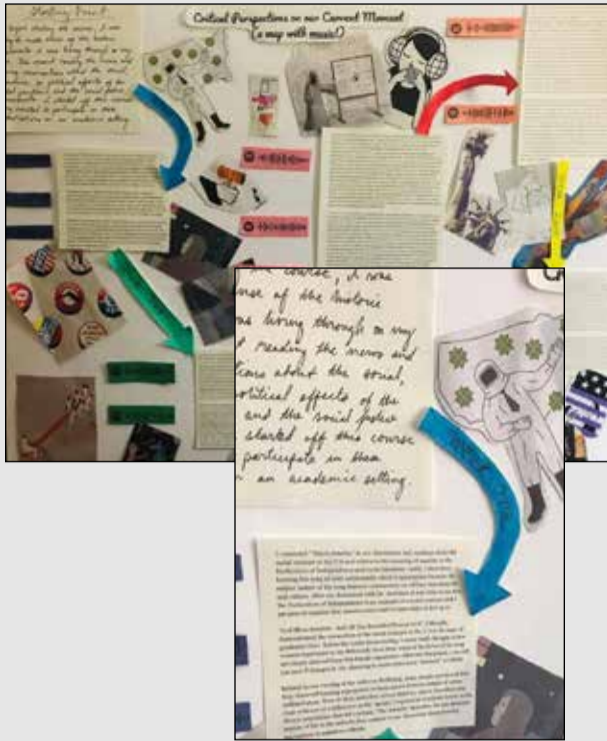
One of the topics we touched on frequently in the class was the idea of a "usable past:" a version of history that you can apply to something, maybe by picking just the right details and just the right evidence. This project inherently was a usable past itself. It couldn't possibly cover everything that happened in the course, or especially in the summer. But it could cover the most interesting things that had happened, and I could use those things to tell a greater story of my own progression. Pictured in the bottom left is me telling that story: not exactly what happened, but an approximation.

### ***Student Reflection—Jeniel Carmona***

During the summer leading up to my first quarter at DePaul, I, like many others, watched from home as the coronavirus pandemic continued to sweep the globe. The public health crisis coincided with the Black Lives Matter movement and other outcries of social injustice which intensified during the summer months, not to mention the many other traumatic events that characterized the year 2020.

Those months left me somewhat overwhelmed, disillusioned, and searching for





[Click to enlarge](#)

**Figure 4: The reflective map of Jenicel Carmona created as her final ISP 300 project;**

**And Figure 5: a detail of her map.**

*Courtesy of the authors*

some way to make it all more comprehensible. Along came the opportunity to participate in a five-week summer course called Critical Perspectives on Our Current Moment which was composed of interdisciplinary lectures and discussions with faculty from DePaul's College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences regarding these significant challenges.

Not only was the class what I had been looking for in terms of gaining a deeper understanding of these complex issues, but it was also a chance to make the transition into college (albeit the pandemic version of college) a little easier. It was a chance to shake off the academic rust that built up over the summer, test the waters of LAS before diving in headfirst for the next four years, get to know the faculty, engage with other students, and try to have some fun along the way—who doesn't love a win-win situation?

Students were expected to document their journeys of navigating these perspectives for a reflective project, which was a visual map connecting the intangible pieces of knowledge we picked up during the five weeks of the course. We were encouraged to get creative and that I did. Because my map ended up looking very bizarre, I will explain my creative choices before diving into some substance of the project (Figure 4).

After each week of readings, lectures, and discussions with different professors, I would type up a couple of paragraphs detailing the subject we considered and the points that resonated with me the most. I would print these paragraphs out and place them on a blank poster board. I thought that the map was looking a little bland. I decided that I would make use of some *New Yorker* magazines I was finished reading and cut out some interesting art related to my writing (Figure 5).

I learned in a psychology class that association is the basis of learning. To better



retain the information in the paragraphs and to make the sharing of my map more interactive, I decided to connect songs to the subject we learned and discussed in class. (I also just wanted to have some fun.) By scanning the barcodes, I included throughout the map on Spotify (Figure 4), others could access the songs with which I made these connections. I also made a playlist called “ISP 330 Reflective Project” on Spotify so that others could look it up and listen!

In total, there were eleven lectures and discussions with different professors, twelve songs from a wide range of artists, thirteen paragraphs that tried to connect it all, and twenty pictures that supplemented the paragraphs included in the reflective project. It would be quite an endeavor to try to summarize all five weeks, so I will share only a few examples.

During the first week, political science professor Dr. Molly Andolina called to our attention the significance of a social contract, like the Declaration of Independence, in light of government actions to limit the spread of the coronavirus and promises of equality that were not always upheld for Americans of all colors. Questions were posed about the authority of the government to forgo rights in order to protect the health of citizens (e.g., stay-at-home orders) and whether or not the Declaration of Independence is a broken social contract as a result of repeated racial injustices. They were difficult to answer, but ultimately crucial to ask and grapple with.

I remember “This is America” by Childish Gambino<sup>7</sup> being all over social media as it was dubbed over many videos of Black Lives Matter protests. Lyrically, I thought the song also connected to the extent of the Declaration’s inclusion of Black Americans to its promises of equality. I included a couple of photos for this entry, but my favorite was a cartoon of a person in a hazmat suit gesturing at the U.S covered with viruses. Prophetically, this was cut out from a March 2019 issue of *The New Yorker*.

The next week, Dr. Daniel Schober talked to us about health disparities between different areas of Chicago. He presented shocking information about “how much the average life expectancy drops when you go to a neighborhood 30 minutes south of downtown.” Before class, we listened to a National Public Radio podcast in which Richard Rothstein detailed the public health problems that surfaced in Baltimore as an implication of housing segregation.<sup>8</sup> I immediately thought of “Baltimore” by Nina Simone.<sup>9</sup> By looking through a public health lens, I was able to understand the close correlation between housing segregation and health disparities.

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7 For a general overview of the song “This is America,” see “This is America (song),” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified 18 June 2021, 07:04, at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/This\\_Is\\_America\\_\(song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/This_Is_America_(song)). A link to the official video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY>.

8 Richard Rothstein, “Historian Says Don’t ‘Sanitize’ How our Government Created Ghettos,” interview by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, 14 May 2015, available here: <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/406699264>.

9 The official audio track for Nina Simone’s “Baltimore” can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztCgNQg9FCQ>.



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**Figure 6: The starting point of Zoe Espinosa’s reflective map; Figure 7: The end point of Zoe Espinosa’s reflective map.**

*Courtesy of the authors*

We learned about involuted and difficult issues throughout the course, but I thought Dr. Christina Rivers had a profound take on how to go about addressing these problems. She posed a modification to the Vincentian Question and changed “What must be done?” to “What must be done now?” Her point was that today, we could demand greater structural change compared to the time of Saint Vincent de Paul since his charitable actions were politically and socially limited. “A Change Is Gonna Come”<sup>10</sup> by Sam Cooke (my favorite civil rights song) came to mind while pondering this question.

From geography, anthropology, and diplomacy, I was introduced to so many more perspectives with which to approach challenges. Along with the defacing of my old magazines and admittedly stretching the meanings of some songs, I was able to produce a reflective map that displayed my learning journey in this one-of-a-kind course.

My experience in the class fully lived up to the expectation. Despite all of the disorder these times have caused, those eleven professors still found the time and felt it necessary to show us new frames of mind—for this, I am very grateful. Academically, I walked away with more lenses through which to view the current challenges, more prepared for what college classes would be like during this unusual time, and ultimately a deeper appreciation for the value of a liberal arts education.

### ***Student Reflection—Zoe Espinosa***

This reflective project was something that truly caused me to think. I was forced

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<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the song “A Change Is Gonna Come,” see “A Change Is Gonna Come,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified 10 June 2021, 14:14, at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Change\\_Is\\_Gonna\\_Come](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Change_Is_Gonna_Come). The official audio may be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEBlaMOmKV4>.

to think about my city, my country, and my life experiences through the lens of a college student, not as a teenager living in her bubble of the suburbs of Chicago. When my professor told our class to make the project in a way that we wanted, I decided to make it a path of my brain, though it is one that is much easier to understand. Ideas jut out from key information, causing me to question what we learned about and apply it to the world I want to see in my lifetime.

I started out, and kept the theme throughout my project, with me being stuck in my bubble (Figure 6). I was raised in a suburb of Chicago that was the very edge of typical “suburb” and the very beginning of rural areas and farmland. Though I identify as a woman of color, which is usually a label that means “underprivileged” in our current society, I recognize the privilege I have had growing up. I grew up in a safe neighborhood with loving parents. Though my family has had its share of hard times, I know that the white appearance to my skin tone and the safe, and almost generic, town I grew up in has been a privilege. I want to recognize this as much as I possibly can because not recognizing these privileges is not fair to those who are forced to suffer.

Including my bubbles throughout my reflective assignment was a way for me to constantly be reflecting on my privilege and thinking of what I can do to further my education and continue to fight for justice. This, I thought, was the most important part of the reflection. I wanted the ability to be able to actually reflect about these new ideas that were being brought to my attention. Through each of my bubbles, you can see more and more cracks being formed along the edges, and that is truly how I felt. Each new bit of information that we were exposed to during this class further hit the bubble I was so comfortable in at home. I also included the way I was thinking after each week inside the bubble, and ways that I could keep exploring topics in order to become more educated. I did not want to sit, not knowing of the severity of injustice we were learning about. I wanted to learn and learn, in order to break my bubble on my own terms.

During the first week, I had to figure out the best way to demonstrate how my brain was processing the information. I decided to create a system where I would write down the key information for the week, and then create paths that branch off the main themes that I found important. I figured that key words I was feeling during processing the information taught to us would be incredibly important to write down. I also did similar with the ideas these themes made me contemplate; I had to write down the ideas that came to my mind that I had not considered before. For example, in the first week of class I was able to write down the feelings I had for our topic of redlining in a way that incorporated the topic and kept my feelings highlighted. For the discussion of the social contract, I wrote down my ideas surrounding questioning what our society deems important for its social contract. I

was forced to think about questioning these established principles we were taught about the social contract and think outside of what the norm was. I thought that including these details in with my project not only would help me organize what I wanted to think of later but would help me realize more and more that the bubble I was in was beginning to burst.

Along with this structure of my project, I added in thought bubbles that branched off of my personal bubble at the end of each week and what we were learning for the week. These thought bubbles were specific to ideas that I had never been forced to think about before, or things that I wanted to start working toward (Figure 7). These thoughts were my ways of really trying to put my new experiences into words. For example, without really looking at the Declaration of Independence like I had in class, I had not thought before that maybe we would be right to revolt against our governmental system or about the implications and effects of the social contract on our society. It had never once crossed my mind. I had never thought that I needed to unlearn half of my public-school education because of the blanket statements on things like segregation and the city structure. And I was forced to look deeper into my intentions and the way I can truly help my community, like being a voter registrar at my high school and having a dedication to social justice. I want to work harder, and these reflections were able to help me outline how I could.

Through this assignment, I was truly able to reflect on the way my city and my country is structured. I definitely do not understand everything, and I know that I still live in my bubble, but I have been able to acknowledge the bubble and recognize the way that the subjects we discussed caused it to rupture. I needed to recognize my privilege more than I had before. I had always fought for justice, I had always desired change, and I had always realized that the systems we have built are corrupt. I had just never truly been forced to look at it through the angle that this class provided me. I needed the ability to see the difference in my life and what to expect in the future to really grasp “what must be done” (Figure 7).

### ***Student Reflection—Cary Robbins***

My professor told me that the zip code you are born into is the single best indicator of how long you will live. This is where my map begins, and it goes on to contain all I had learned and where my imagination took me during the five weeks of this course. On the map, I wrote of the policies I learned about, and I used a multitude of different quotes from class readings. I included quotes in the map that most stood out to me and taught me about policies such as blockbusting, redlining, and felony disenfranchisement. I was also able to read people’s stories of experiencing discrimination, racism, and so much more. By the end, I was able to see how my classmates’ maps turned out and how their imaginations



[Click to enlarge](#)

**Figure 8: The reflective map of Cary Robbins created as her final ISP 300 project.**

*Courtesy of the authors*

created entirely different, unique maps.

My map begins at my house. I live in a privileged neighborhood. I have access to resources such as grocery stores, schools, and hospitals; however, I recognize that not everyone has the same access to healthy, quality food; education; and adequate health care resources. These are all privileges I am accustomed to because I have grown up with them. The older I get, the more I learn how many factors play into how privileged I am, including wealth and race.

There is a red line that goes through my map, which represents the redlining policies used in the early to mid-1900s. One side of the red line shows houses that were once in redlined neighborhoods, which continue to face discrimination in access to essentials like hospital services. *Health Affairs* ran an article describing how “the lower a person’s economic status, the more limited their resources and ability to access essential goods and services” is and “the greater their chance of suffering from chronic disease, including conditions like heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes that may increase the mortality risk of COVID-19.”<sup>11</sup> It is clear that policies that were supposedly abolished decades ago are still in practice today, even if it is not a lawful practice. Banks and hospitals continue to illegally refuse service to once-redlined neighborhoods.

Another system that has continued is the practice of slave labor. In the top right section of my map, there are drawings of a person behind bars and barbed wire. There, the horrible conditions of the US prison system are described. Anabel Mendoza of *The*

11 Emily A. Benfer and Lindsay F. Wiley, “Health Justice Strategies to Combat COVID-19: Protecting Vulnerable Communities During APandemic,” *HealthAffairsBlog*, HealthAffairs, 19 March 2020, at: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20200319.757883/full/>



*Chicago Reporter* writes how COVID-19 seriously affects many incarcerated people's lives. It reports that "men curl up in their beds, aching from chills and fevers, while others attempt to wash their cell walls using dirty rags and hotel-sized bars of soap that some will later use to wash their bodies."<sup>12</sup> The prison system is disgusting in the United States, and there needs to be a change to how the nation treats those who are accused of a crime. The system is considered "plantation to prison" because of the slave labor forced on incarcerated people as well as the statistics of who is more likely to go to jail. Black men are six times more likely to go to jail than white men are because of systemic racism, including over-policing in Black neighborhoods. Slavery did not go away by any means but was transformed into the legal prison system.

Not only does the US fail to treat incarcerated people justly, but it also treats anyone deemed "foreign" as subhuman. After taking this class, I went on to learn more about how the horrific ways in which the US deals with people seeking refuge. In the class, we read about how the US does not protect refugees from COVID-19. The Marshall Project described the conditions in detention centers as "cramped and unsanitary detention centers where social distancing was near impossible and protective gear almost nonexistent."<sup>13</sup> Thousands of asylum-seekers have been deported from the United States since COVID-19 was announced and lockdown began. The country has continued to show how little respect it has for most humans, especially those who are not wealthy and white.

During the summer of 2020, multiple statues of white colonizers, like Christopher Columbus, were taken down and sometimes thrown into bodies of water by protesters. This symbolized people wanting to end the whitewashed myths that have been taught for centuries. In the center of the map, there is a drawing of a statue being taken down. The class talked about the importance of statues and memorials, and I learned the difference between a statue and art that is created by a community to represent an idea. Statues of people do not hold as much significance as art that is created by a community to show their perspective on historical events.

Together as a community, we should make sure everyone has a voice and that those voices are heard. Wangari Maathai said that "poverty will cause environmental degradation."<sup>14</sup> This quote is written inside the trunk of the tree on my map. The tree symbolizes how much we need to come together to build a strong community. Maathai talked about how tomorrow is not guaranteed, and for people

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12 Anabel Mendoza, "Forgotten: Stateville Inmates Warn of Rising COVID-19 Outbreak behind Bars," *The Chicago Reporter*, 26 June 2020, at: <https://www.chicagoreporter.com/forgotten-stateville-inmates-warn-of-rising-covid-19-outbreak-behind-bars/>.

13 Emily Kassie and Barbara Marcolini, "How ICE Exported the Coronavirus: An Investigation Reveals How Immigration and Customs Enforcement Became a Domestic and Global Spreader of COVID-19," The Marshall Project, 10 July 2020, see: <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/07/10/how-ice-exported-the-coronavirus>.

14 "Wangari Maathai & The Green Belt Movement," Good Fortune, 9 July 2010, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQU7JOxkGvo>.

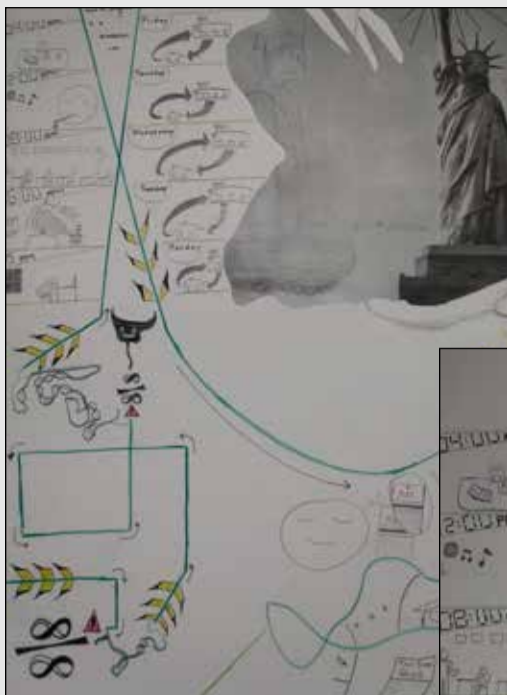
who do not have much of anything, much of their time is focused on survival, leaving little energy for thinking about the future. If we all took the time to help build things as simple as community gardens or trees, we could create healthy and free resources that should be a right for everyone. The map ends with my desire to start a non-waste, nonprofit grocery store and recreational centers in a food desert community in Memphis, my hometown. I am hopeful for the city of Memphis, and I want to be a part of helping my community continue to grow for everyone.

### ***Student Reflection—George Slad***

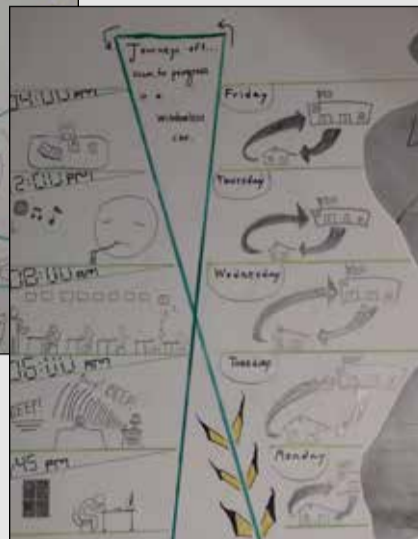
If I were to map out my life in 2020, my experience as a student in ISP 330 would fall almost exactly in the middle, and that is not only because the course took place roughly half-way through the year (in July and August), but because it fell between disorganized chaos and organized chaos. Yes, you read that correctly. The first half of 2020 was, for me, as it was for many, a whirlwind of tremendous change: suddenly, I was taking all my classes online; suddenly, my high school graduation was decimated to a YouTube video; suddenly, I was going to be stuck in virtually the same environment for college as the one I had been in for high school. I failed again and again to put together a new routine; as a result, my life fell apart.

Then came an email from DePaul about ISP 330, which ended up being an excellent course for me to take. In a time in which everything about my life seemed to be falling apart, to gather “critical perspectives on [what was then] our current moment” hardly could have occurred at a better time. In my opinion, ISP 330’s greatest strength was the diverse group which led it: political science professors, an English professor, a diplomacy professor, a religious studies professor, and a geography professor, among others. In the course, I enjoyed a thorough look into DePaul’s academics and one of the most critical looks at the US I have ever witnessed.

I will now address the culmination of my work for ISP 330. The final assignment, the reflective project (Figure 9), is a map of one’s learning experience just before, during, and at the conclusion of the course. The contents of my map are tied together by a single line that changes color and behavior. My map very much emphasizes the chaos I previously talked about. On the front side of the double-sided map, I mainly present my situation before COVID-19 thoroughly transformed my world. I was following a generally ironclad routine, and one that I had been following for a long time. I believe that once we get into maintaining a routine, nonstop for a while, we fall asleep in a certain way. Using the mathematical problem



[Click to enlarge](#)



**Figure 9: The reflective map of George Slad created as his final ISP 300 project; Figure 10: Detail of the reflective map of George Slad.**

*Courtesy of the authors*

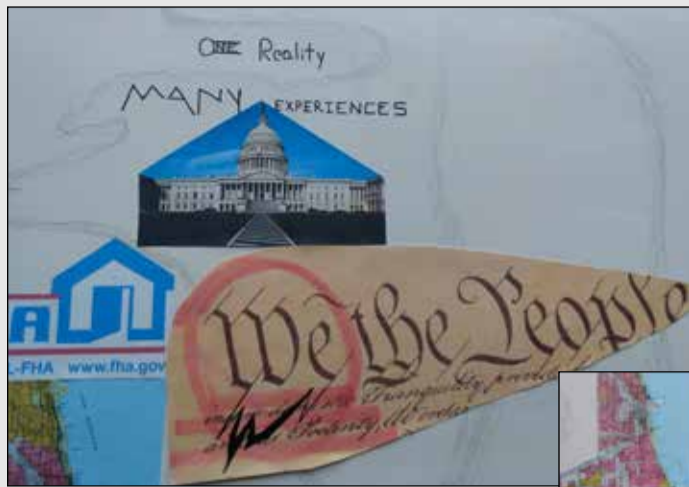
of infinity divided by infinity, which equals the indeterminate (i.e., something undefined), I show that I was lost, internally, in the months *before* the pandemic (Figure 10).

I consider the epicenter of the front side of the map to be the grayscale image of the Statue of Liberty, on which I, myself, am drawn wearing a graduation gown, appearing miserable. This image will likely, and understandably, come off as offensive to some. I intend for this image to be a representation of the state of my view of the US before ISP 330 began; obviously, it suggests that my view of it was not good. The COVID-19 pandemic had revealed a lot to me (and continues to reveal a lot to me) about the reality of the US government, and how successfully the US has achieved the ideals it was founded upon. Moreover, I had been frustrated by the increasing difficulty of becoming informed; I felt like the task of becoming informed was no different than trying to stay standing in a wind tunnel with the voices of an innumerable number of people arguing with each other, at the top of their lungs, stuck in my head. I felt overloaded with information, among other things.

The back side of my map focuses on my experiences in ISP 330, presenting them in a week-by-week fashion. Each week features its own synopsis and images. I would like to talk about the center of the back side (Figure 11). The statement “One Reality Many Experiences” is written. What I am saying there is that we all live in the same place but experience it in many ways. I realize that it may have been more appropriate to say “One Reality One Experience,” considering what I was going for. Each person’s life experience is unique, yet it is also greatly, and inevitably, shaped by the life experiences of others. Nothing, *nothing*, is completely independent.

Below that statement is an image of the Capitol Building, and further below is a

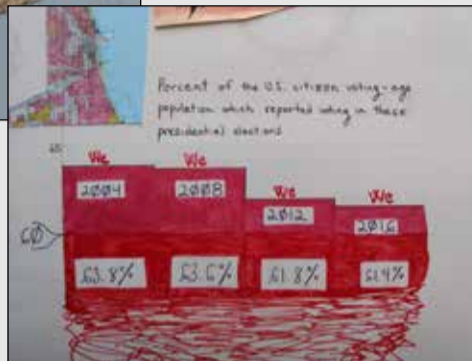




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**Figures 11 and 12: Details of the reflective map of George Slad.**

*Courtesy of the authors*



cutout of part of the Constitution. In that cutout, the “we” in “We the People” is circled and underlined in red and extending from it is a jagged line. Further below is a red graph which displays data, released by the Census Bureau, of the percent of the voting-age population of US citizens which reported voting in certain presidential elections (Figure 12). I feature the data for the 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016 presidential elections; as you can see, in each subsequent presidential election, that percentage diminishes (the 2020 presidential election annihilated this trend). Above the percentage for each of the presidential elections the word “we” is written. How many of the “we” in “We the People” participate in democracy at its arguably most fundamental level? The line that ties all the pieces of the map together returns to the front side of the map and ends at a short text which focuses on the relationship one shares with one’s home.

If there is anything my map captures, it is not any of the specific things I learned in ISP 330, but the breadth and depth of what I learned in ISP 330. The course was only five weeks long, but it was dense. Every aspect of the course’s content complemented each other and connected to each other well, and, at least in my experience of the course, if some connections were hard to see at first, they became clear by the time the course was over. The knowledge I gained from ISP 330 will likely be informing decisions I make in what is to come of my college career.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

The year 2020 was one that challenged every single member of our community. Changing teaching and learning modes, figuring out how to live and work in a single space, and finding ways to cope with overwhelming stress and uncertainty when traditional coping

mechanisms became inaccessible created a kind of common ground that transcended many typical social and cultural boundaries within and beyond DePaul. Finding ways to connect meaningfully in a virtual environment was a goal for so many institutions and organizations during the year, and this course was a very successful iteration of such an endeavor. Faculty, staff, and students shared ideas, created community, and offered one another a sense of support. We hope these eloquent and personal student reflections and the context provided of a committed collective effort on the part of faculty and staff stand as a testament to the DePaul community—a community grounded in strong Vincentian values, a commitment to undergraduate learning, and a desire to transform students through meaningful engagement.

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**Figures 1a and 1b: Two different maps submitted to Citylab. Both are examples of maps categorized as Domestic Rearrangements and were submitted by: Lora Teagarden of Indianapolis Indiana (top); and An Trinh from Haiphong, Vietnam (bottom).**

See: <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-coronavirus-lockdown-neighborhood-maps/>

Courtesy of the authors



# Introduction to Week 1

In our first week, we will explore social contract theory, connecting the philosophy of John Locke to our principle founding documents (the Declaration of the Independence and the Constitution). We will use this framework to examine the current moment, with particular attention to the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests.

We can see how the social contract is practiced by looking at how spaces are constructed. We will use a geographic lens to explore how inequality is actively built into the urban landscape. A geographic lens allows us to explore *why* things happen *where* they do.

In 1754, Benjamin Franklin created a political cartoon to advocate that the colonies unite. Though it was published during the French and Indian War, the image later became a symbol for the Revolutionary War efforts. [Image via.](#)



Online Student Success	3	Introduction to Week 1	Web Page	✓
Introduction and Resources	3	Week 1 Readings and Videos	Checklist	✓
Week One: The Social Contract in our Current Moment [7/13 - 7/19]	5	Week 1 Check for Learning	Quiz	□
Week Two: Equity and Justice in a Time of Pandemic [7/20 - 7/26]	7	Week 1 Discussion	Discussion Topic	□
Week Three: The Past and Its Lessons [7/27 - 8/2]	7			
Week Four: Artists and Writers in Moments of Upheaval [8/3 - 8/9]	7			
Week Five: Global Interconnections and the Paths Forward	7			

First, in preparation for our class, you read one really old document (the Declaration of Independence), followed by three newer essays. Make a connection between something in the Declaration of Independence and either the Mann, Spaeth, or Gladwell reading. How do you see them connected to each other?

Next, consider the Demby video and the Kern reading. Where are you from? Can you see how the policies discussed in the video have shaped the place where you live? How? How is your experience of the city gendered? Think of specific examples.

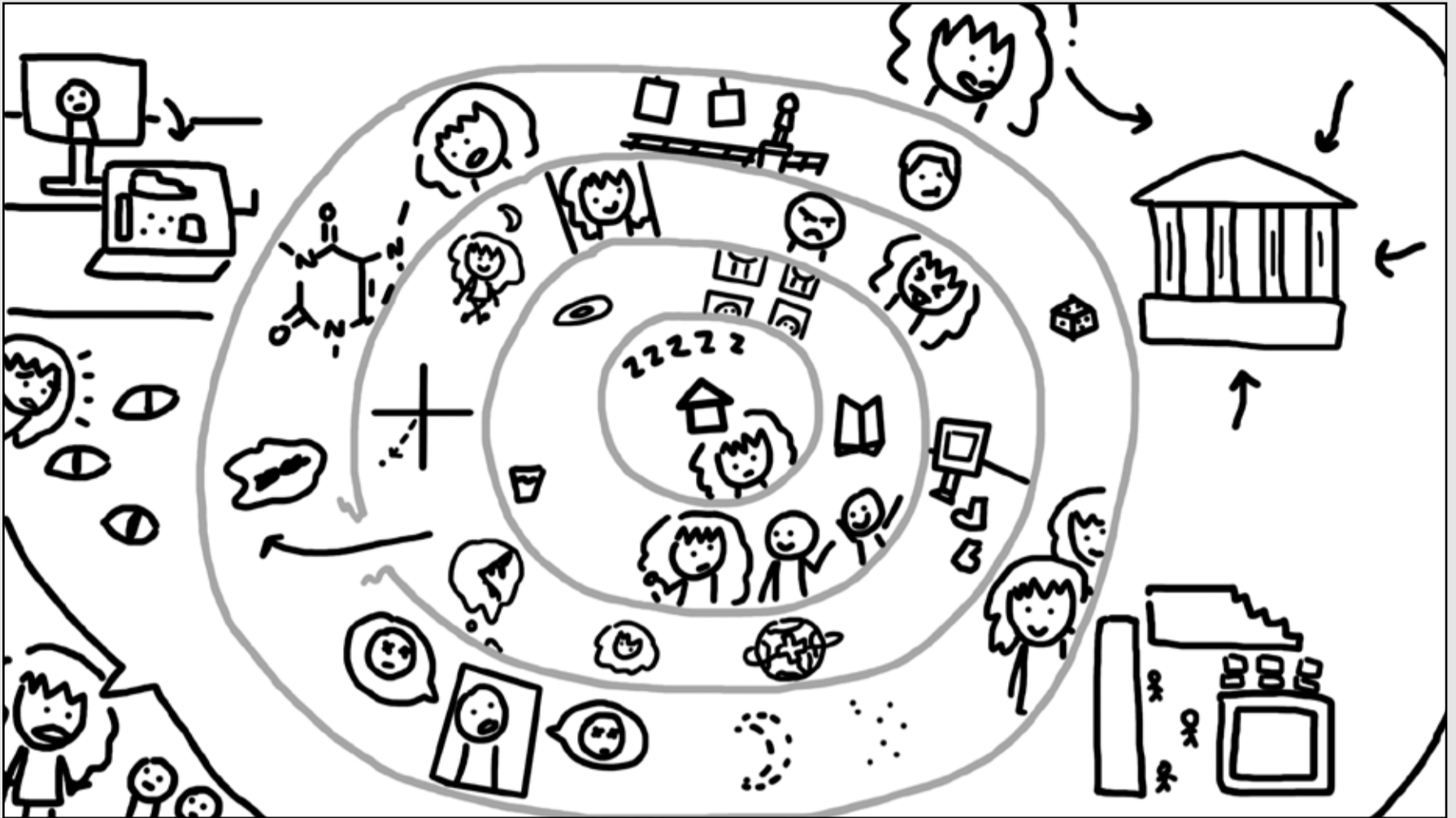
Finally, if you could add a reading or podcast or video to this week, what would it be, and why?

For the online discussions in this class, please try to post before our Tuesday synchronous meeting, as a way to seed the conversation. You can also use this discussion space to extend the conversation after the Tuesday session. You don't need to reply to any of your classmates, but you're welcome to do so.

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**Figures 2a and 2b: Images from the course *Desire to Learn (D2L)* illustrating how each week was presented to students, thereby creating a uniform set of activities and expectations.**

*Courtesy of the authors*



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**Figure 3: The reflective map of Val Carnes created as their final ISP 300 project.**

*Courtesy of the authors*





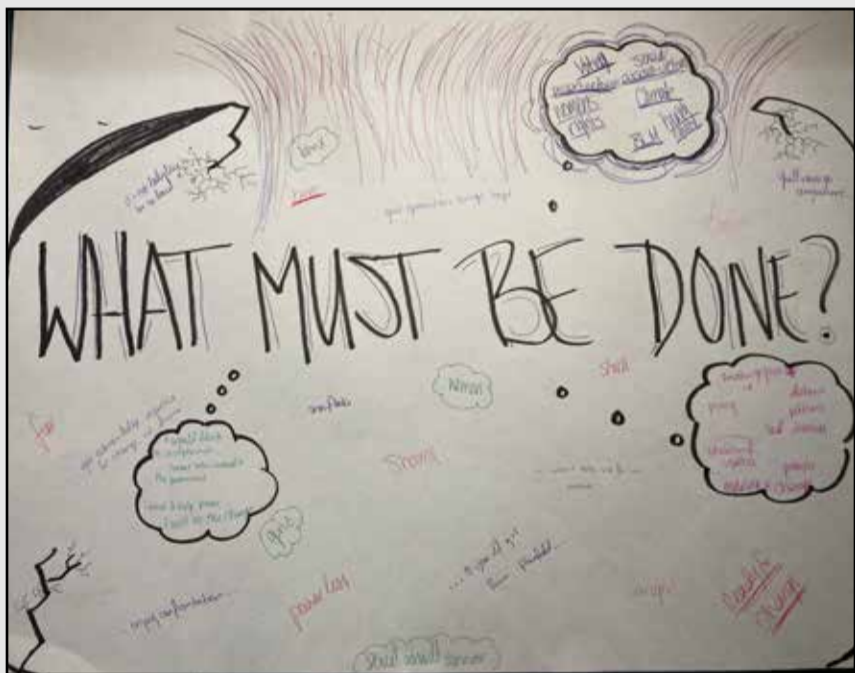
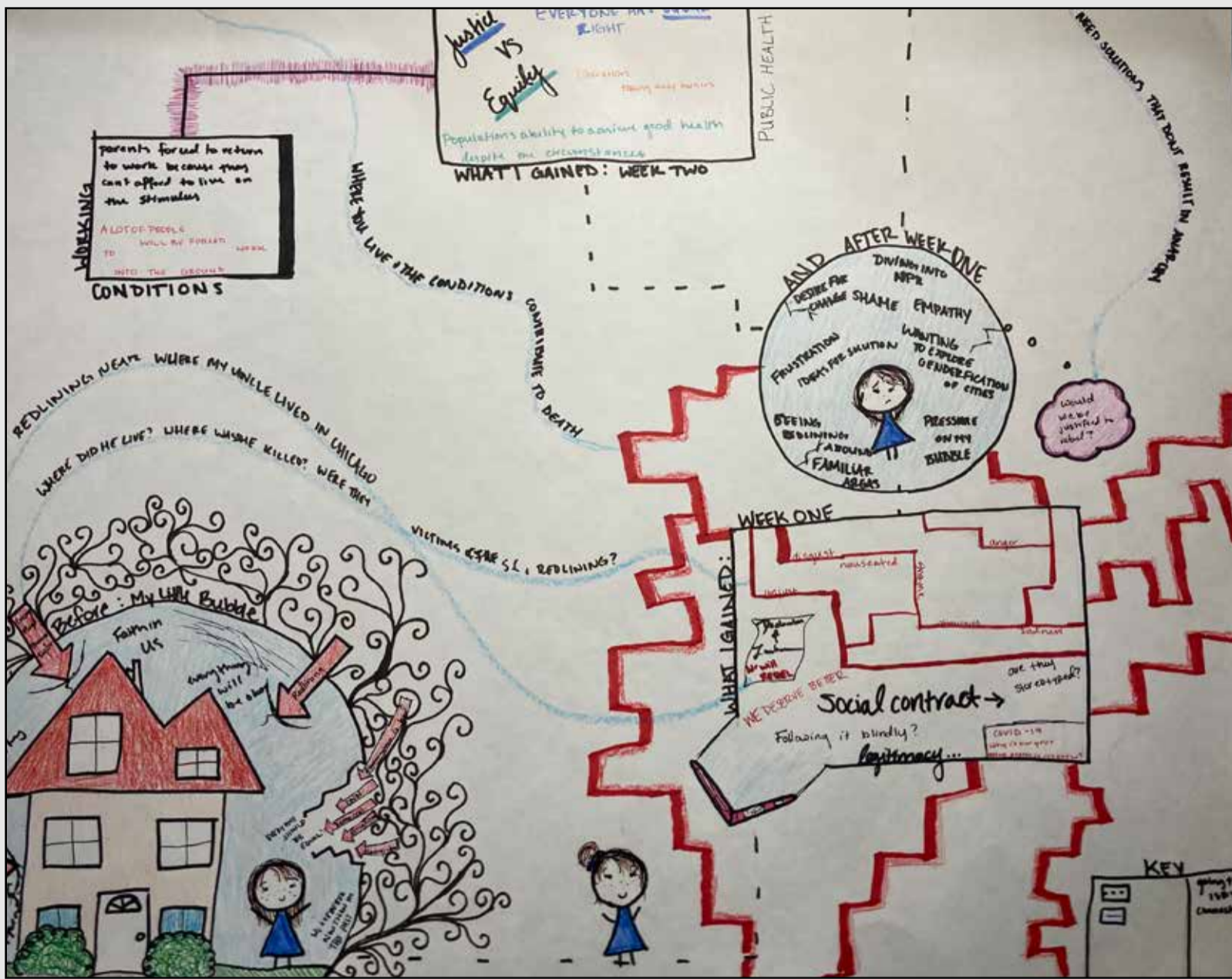
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**Figure 4: The reflective map of Jeniel Carmona created as her final ISP 300 project;**

**And Figure 5: a detail of her map.**

Courtesy of the authors



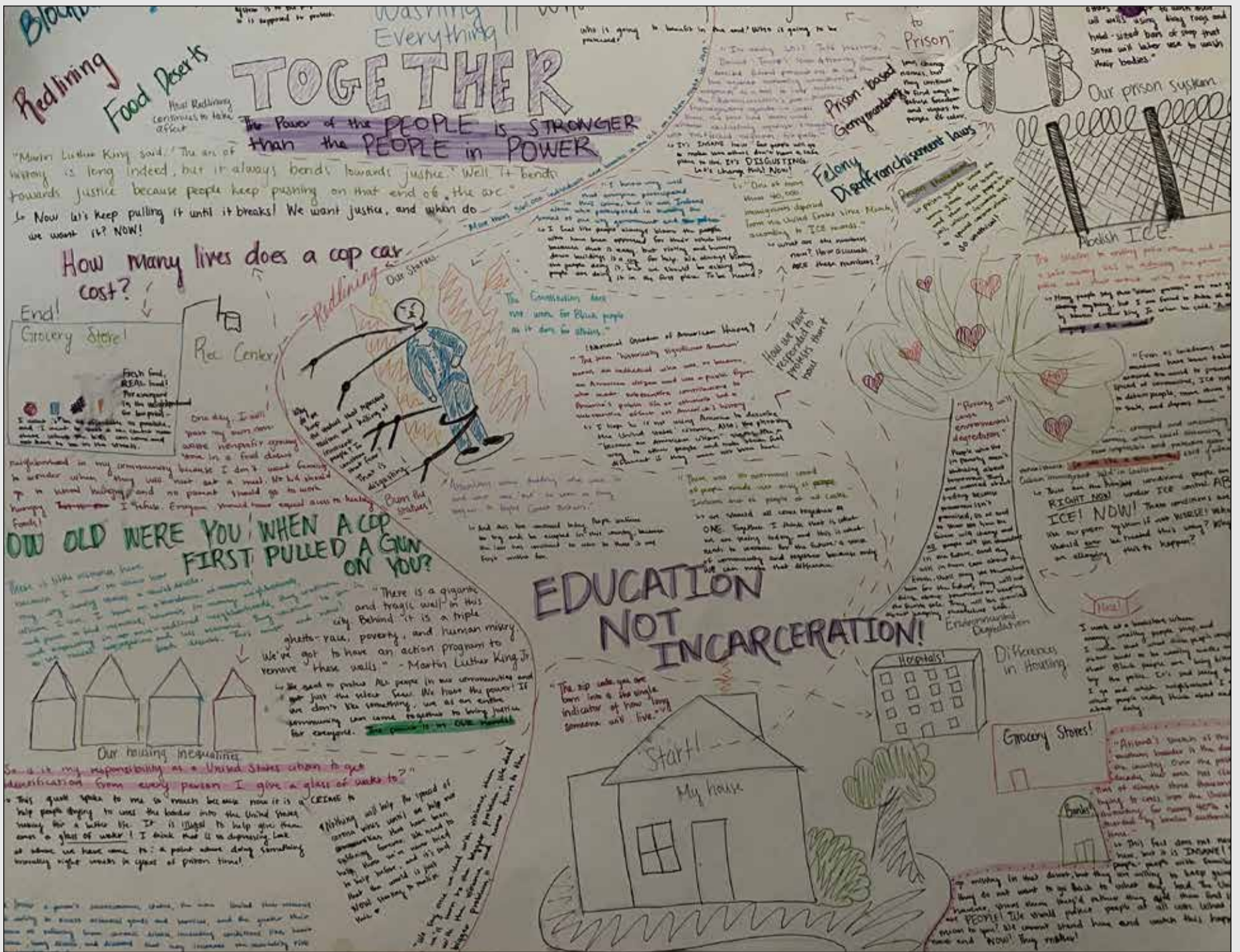


**Figure 6: The starting point of Zoe Espinosa's reflective map; Figure 7: The end point of Zoe Espinosa's reflective map.**

Courtesy of the authors

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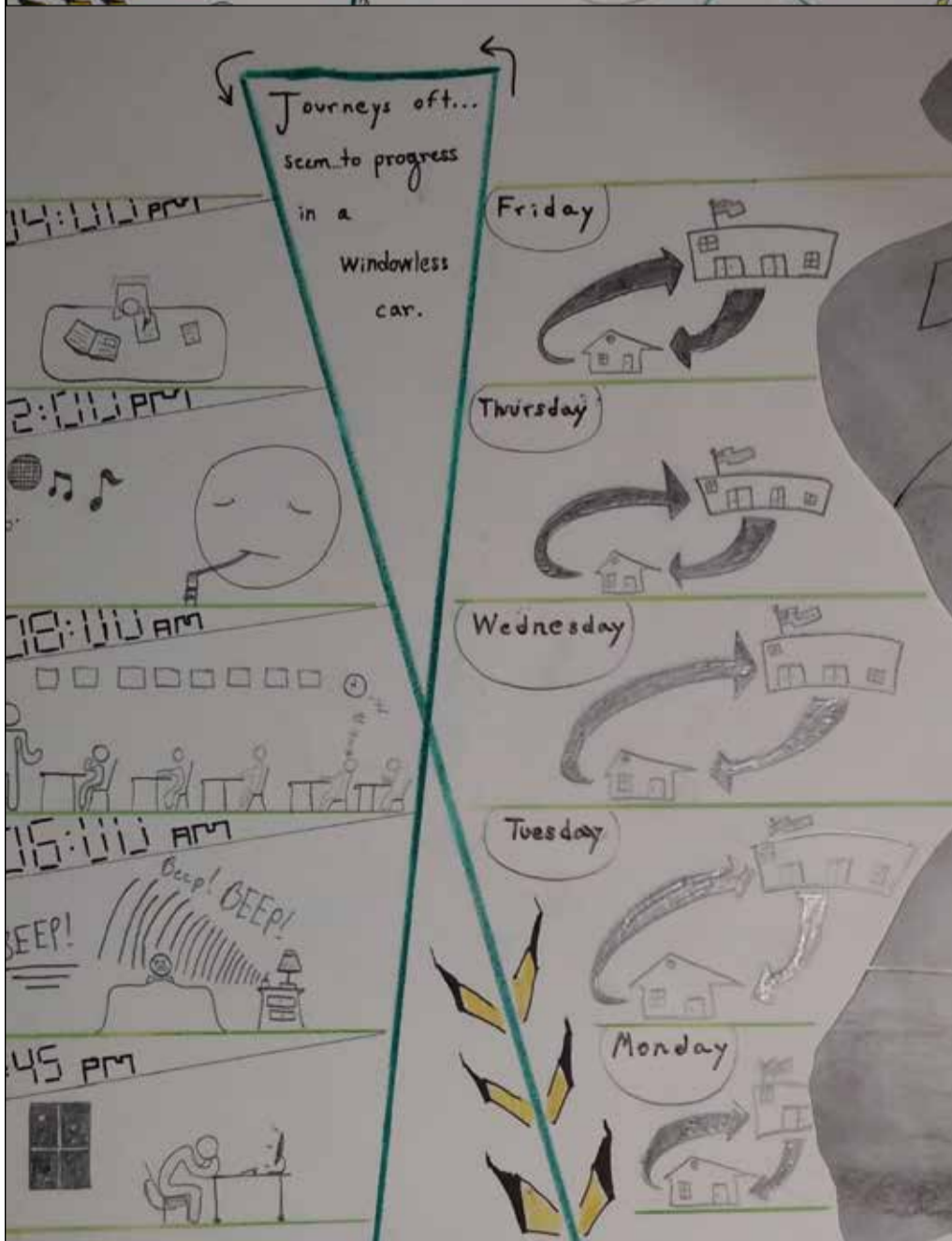
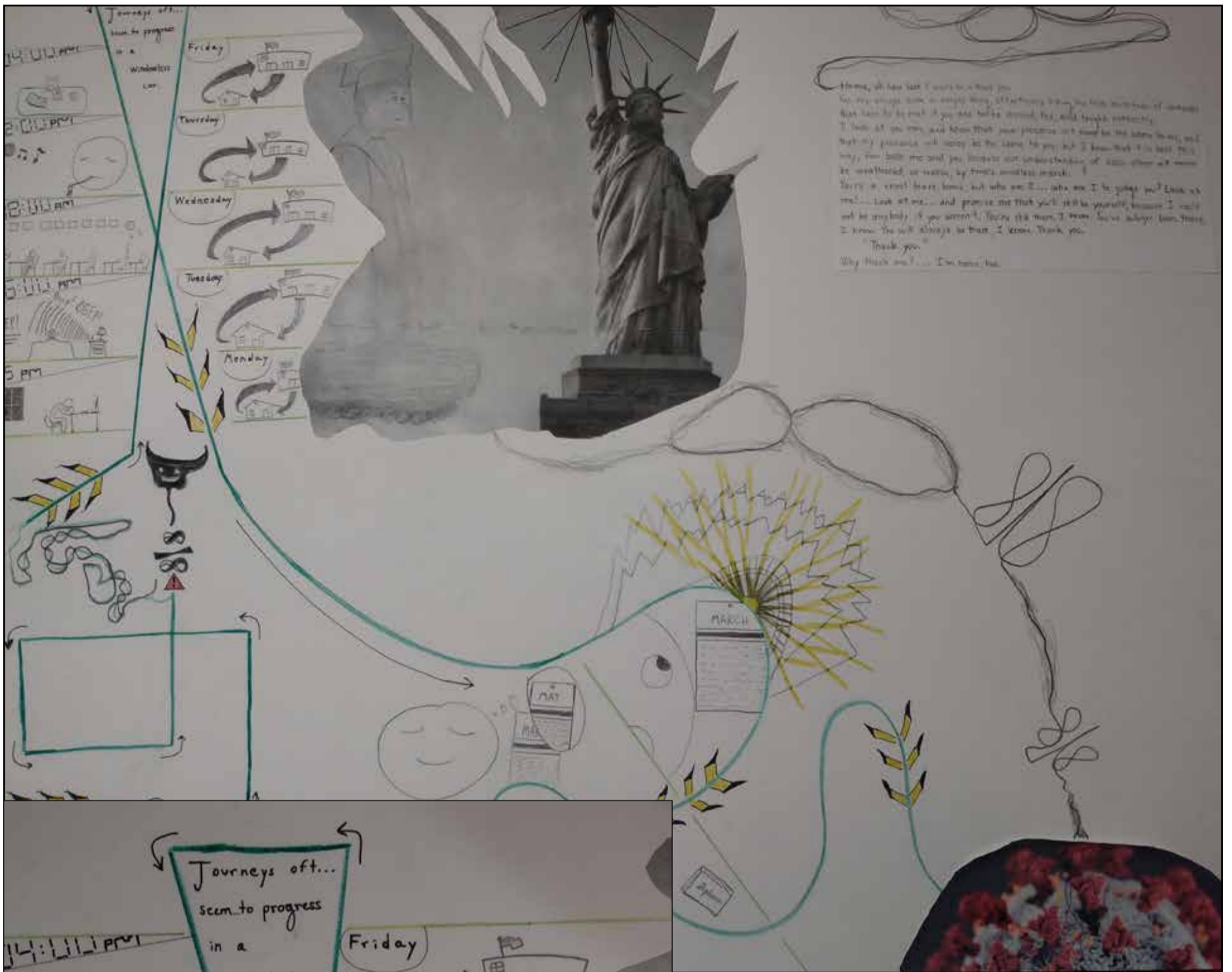


**Figure 8: The reflective map of Cary Robbins created as her final ISP 300 project.**

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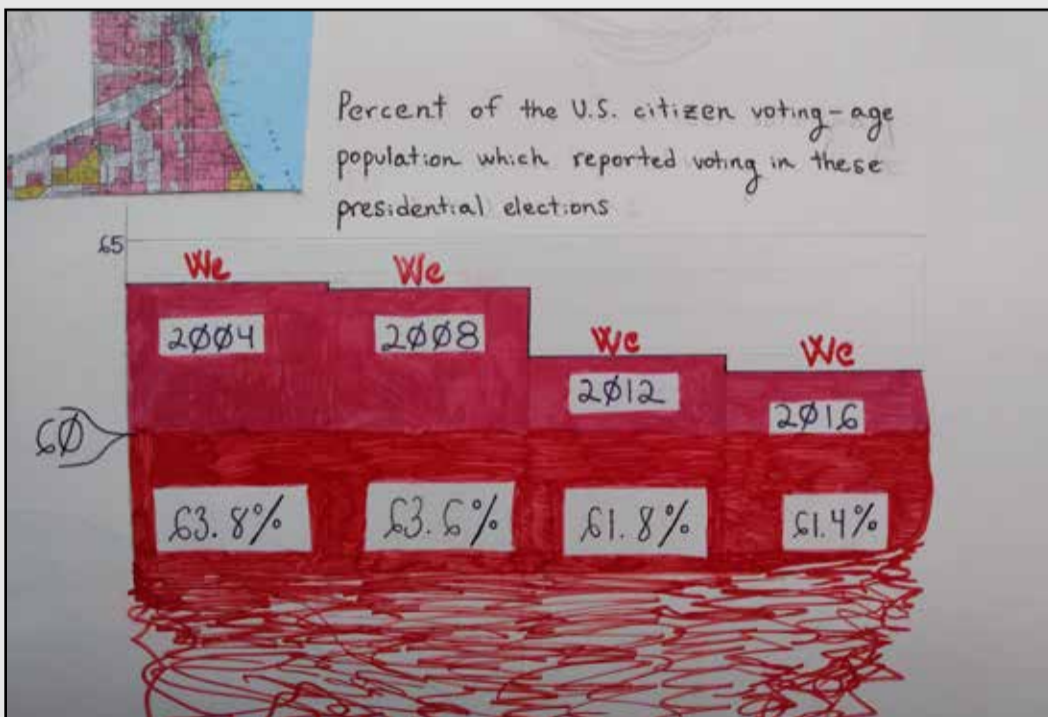
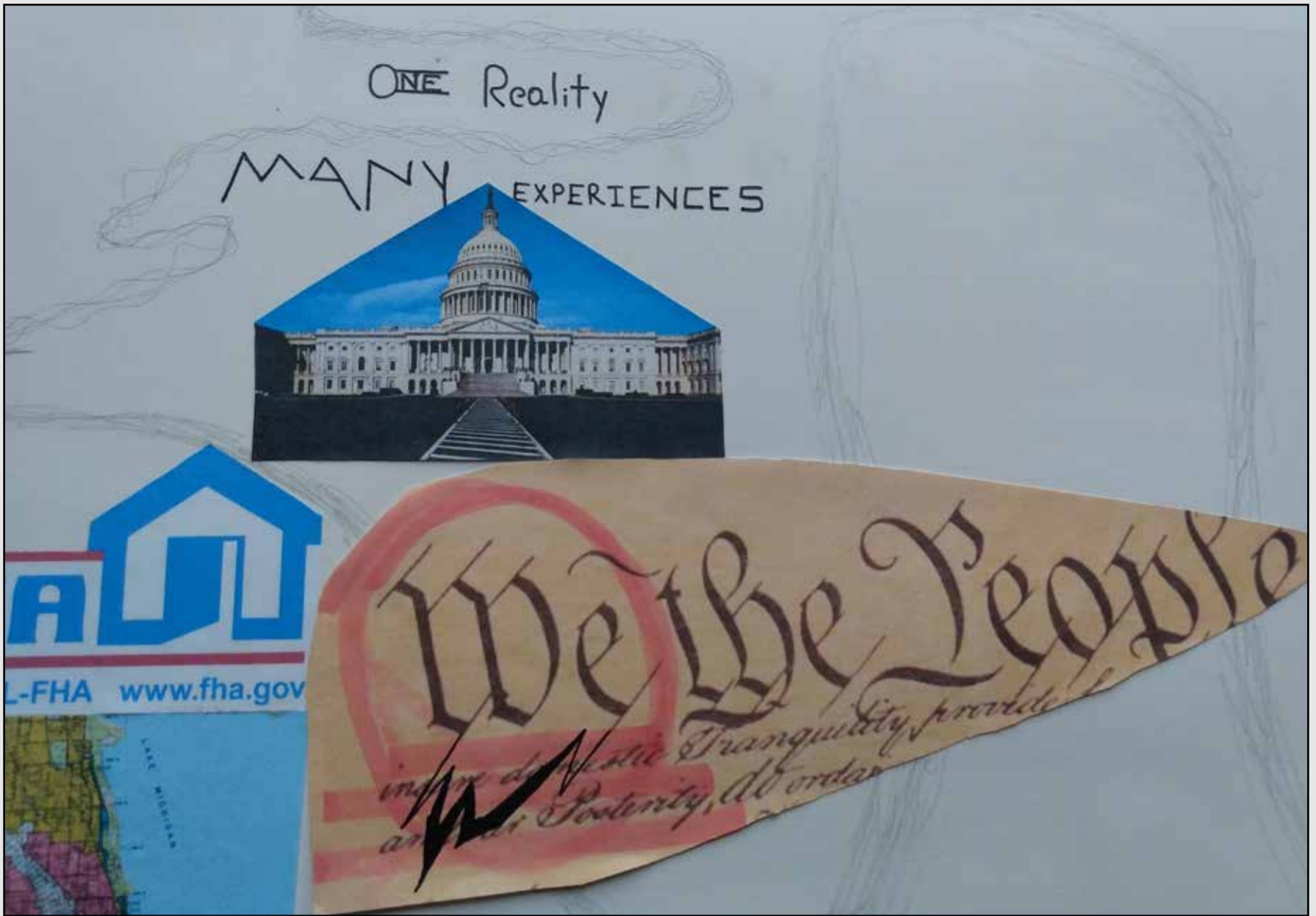




**Figure 9: The reflective map of George Slad created as his final ISP 300 project; Figure 10: Detail of the reflective map of George Slad.**

Courtesy of the authors

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**Figures 11 and 12: Details of the reflective map of George Slad.**

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