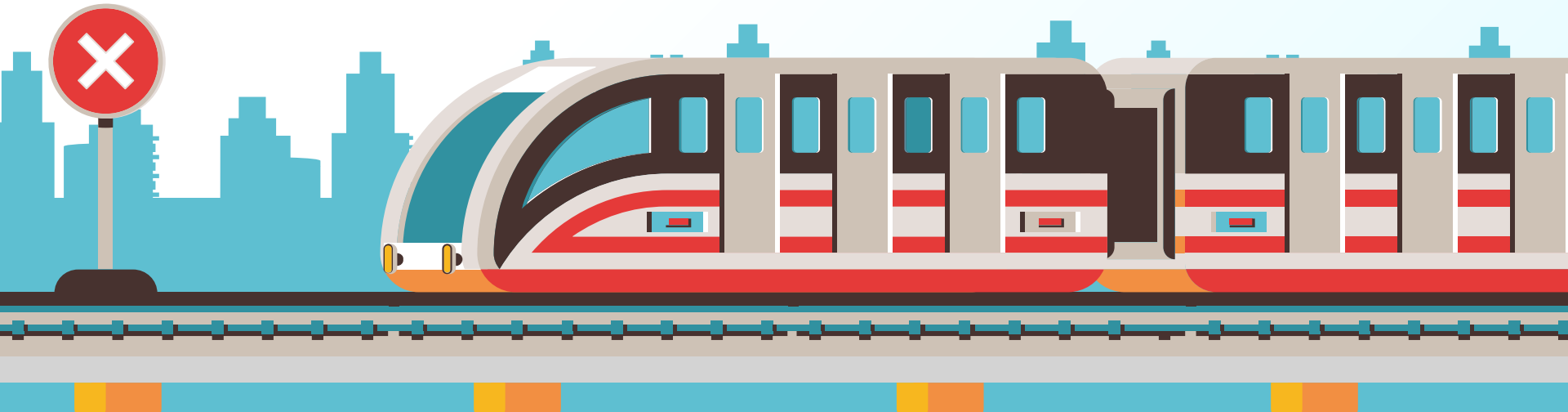


HOSTILE ARCHITECTURE

Francesca Lapointe, Jasmine Man, Lucy Chen, Nicole Chen, Suah Kim



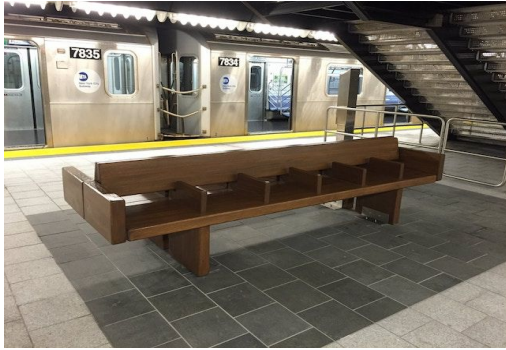
01

History

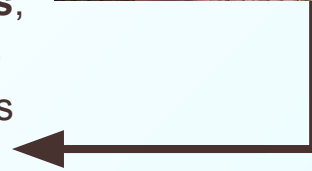


Hostile Architecture

- **DEFINITION:** Hostile architecture are designs that are used to push certain people and behaviors out of public space
 - **Example:** bench dividers, ground or ledge spikes, and sloped seating
- In the early 1800s in Europe, cities installed **wall shelves and rounded alley corners** to stop people from using streets as toilets



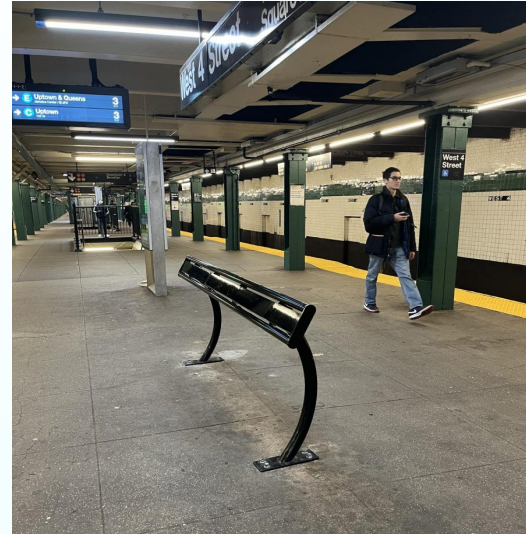
Over time, similar design choices move into the U.S. and are used as **social and physical boundaries**, shaping who is allowed to stay in a space and who is pushed out

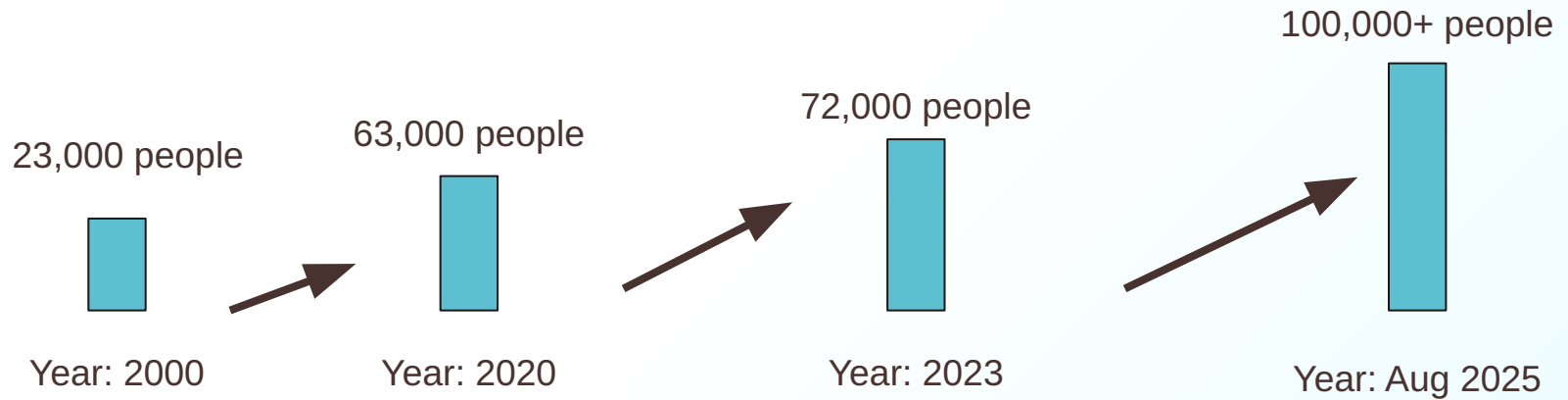




Through the 2000s and 2010s, the pattern continues with **anti homeless spikes**, **segmented subway benches**, and **leaning bars** replacing traditional seats

In 1990, for example, the MTA removed benches from some subway platforms specifically to **stop homeless New Yorkers** from sleeping there





The Department of Homeless Services shelter census rose about **175.0%** from roughly **23,000** people in January 2000 to nearly **63,000** in January 2020, then climbed again after 2022 as rents increased and pandemic protections expired

By January 2023, over **72,000** people were sleeping in NYC's main shelter system, the highest level since the 1980s. By August 2025, the nightly count topped **100,000**, with thousands more in streets, subways, and other public spaces

New York's hostile architecture **does not address the root causes of homelessness**. Instead, it turns everyday elements like benches, planters, and railings into tools that constantly push unhoused people away

02

Causes & Implications



Driving Factors

- Hostile architecture has historically been used to target “**undesirable**” populations like the homeless and the poor, treating them as obstacles to creating a desired public image
- City planners aim to make these spaces more palatable for its middle and upper class residents while becoming less accessible for vulnerable populations



Key Implications



- Designs such as spiked surfaces, benches with armrests, and leaning bars make it harder for disabled people to navigate spaces.
- Inconvenient armrest benches and spiked surface negatively affect the elderly, pregnant women, and children. The presence of hostile architecture in itself perpetuates class distinctions by indicating people of a certain socioeconomic status are unwelcome.
- Defeats the purpose of public spaces as places for social encounter.

03

Social and Government



What is revealed by Hostile Architecture through City Regulations

- Built environments shapes who is recognized as a “citizen.” When cities use design to remove homeless people, it signals that they are not seen as part of the public
- Homelessness is treated as a nuisance to manage by governmental, political, and corporate powers, not as a social issue to solve
- Public spaces are designed and regulated to encourage consumption and discourage lingering
- Non-consumers, including homeless people, are displaced through policing, surveillance, and exclusionary design



Policing Homelessness

- NYC prioritizes tourism and consumer-friendly public spaces as important drivers of economic growth
- Seable homelessness tends to be perceived as a threat to safety, city branding, and tourism revenue
- Rather than investing primarily in permanent housing solutions, the city spends billions on policing, enforcement, and temporary management of homelessness
- “In her State of the State address, Governor Hochul announced a new subway policing initiative to address public safety concerns among overnight subway riders
- According to the New York City Independent Budget Office, the program is estimated to cost between \$61 million and \$159 million on top of existing policing and regulation”



04

Irony



CUNY Commuters

Inaccessibility

Unintentionally burdening disabled, pregnant, and vulnerable riders, amplifying the struggle of navigating the crowded, suffering transit systems in our city.

Ironically, as commuter students rushing through the city, we **overlook** hostile designs that quietly shape our own daily discomfort.



Overcrowding

Average weekday ridership: 1.29 million
Average weekend ridership: 1.46 million

Homelessness

Homelessness grew by 53.1% from January 2023 to January 2024



Big Businesses

S

Unemployment

In August 2025, there were approximately 397,900 unemployed people in New York City, with an unemployment rate of 4.9%

Big businesses welcome customers with polished storefronts while **supporting exclusionary designs and hiring practices** that fuel homelessness.



Wealth Gap

NYC's \$1 trillion economy hides stark inequality, with the top 1% earning 40% while millions face poverty and housing insecurity.

“Entry-Level”

- 12% of firms cut hiring due to AI automation.
- Employers now demand advanced degrees and years of experience even for entry-level job

Government Policy

NYC policies claim to address homelessness but rely on hostile architecture that displaces vulnerable people and families **without lasting solutions.**

Subway Safety Plan

The city pledged 500 low-barrier shelter beds, but the dorm-style format is unattractive to many unhoused individuals



Ineffective Policy

Advocates stress that permanent housing is needed, as temporary shelters and hostile architecture merely displace people.

Shelters

As of Sept 2024, 350,000 New Yorkers were homeless—including 131,000 in shelters nightly, mostly families and 45,000 children.



05

Taking Action



Raise Awareness



1. Use Social Media
 - Post photos of hostile architecture with hashtags like #HostileDesign to bring attention to the issue, and encourage others to do the same
 - Pictures of examples all across the city reinforces the severity of this issue
 - Tag local news, journalists, and community groups to reach a wider audience

Direct Action



1. Sign existing petitions against hostile architecture, or you could start your own
2. Support activist groups
 - Donate or volunteer with organizations that advocate for the homeless and fight against hostile organizations
 - Some examples of these organizations include the National Coalition for the Homeless
3. Advocate for policies that require the involvement of local communities in the public space design process, as community feedback is crucial for creating inclusive environments



Creative Methods



1. Make stickers labeling hostile architecture
 - a. Doesn't damage the property, yet brings attention
2. Modifying or adding things to make hostile architecture more user-friendly
 - a. A group called Softwalks, from NY, created simple chairs, tables, plant pots, and other modular furniture that can be hooked or installed onto existing urban structures → reclaims spaces that have been made unfriendly intentionally
 - b. Artist Sarah Ross' "Archisuits," tracksuits equipped and suited to defy hostile architecture by creating additional spaces where there are no room to sit/rest



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