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# The Revanchist Explorer

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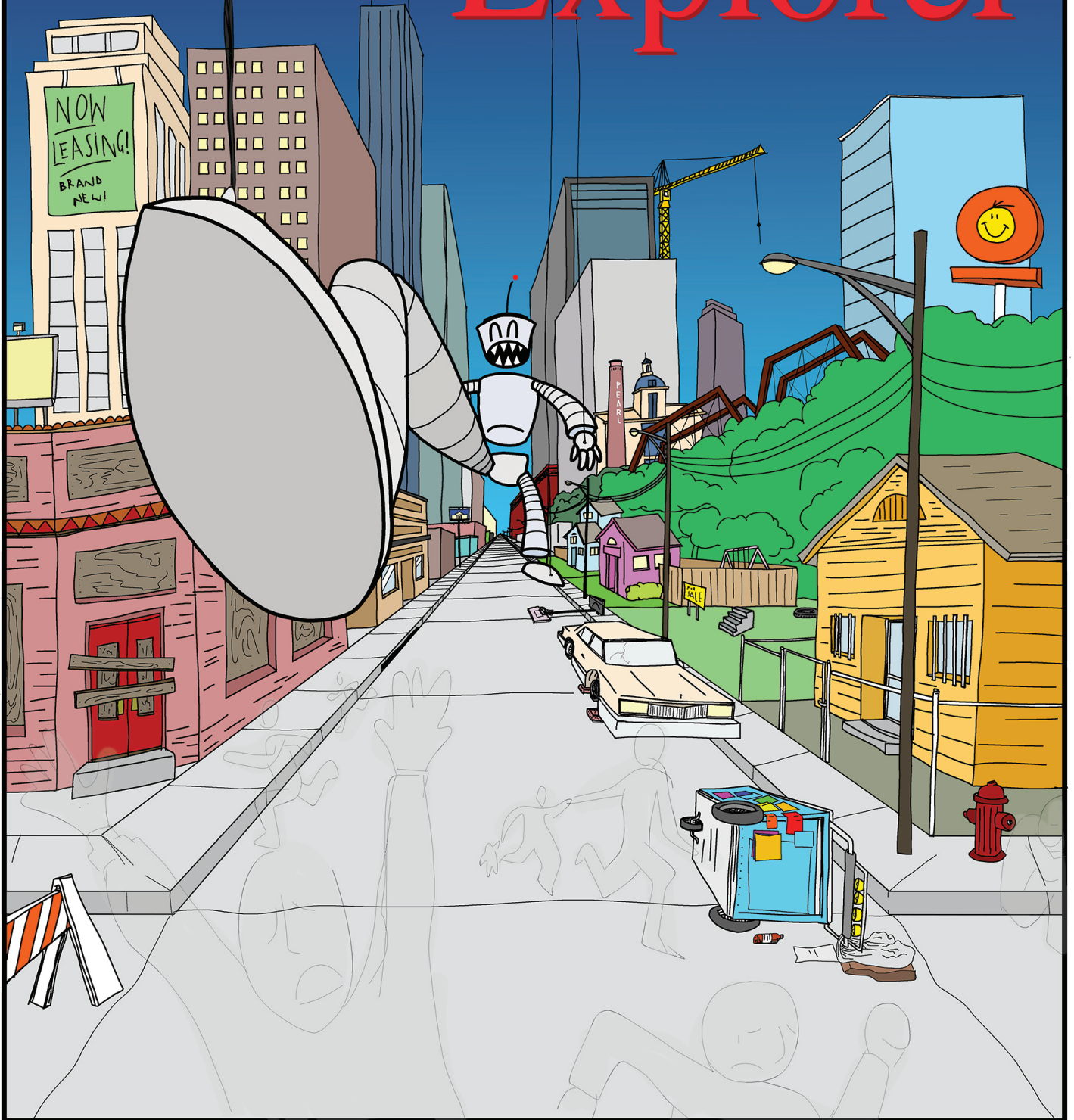
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# The Revanchist Explorer



Starring the Neoliberal City  
*Coming to a neighborhood near you.*



## References

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The process of creating this movie poster has been a cycle of discovering and rediscovering literature, applying it locally, and then finding a ways to incorporate visually. Before turning my to conduct my own research, my inspiration began from information and material from a variety of sources that I crossed paths with in different ways. Ever since moving to San Antonio, I have always been intrigued by the Tower of the Americas as a symbol for the city. It has made its way into several of my illustrations, most recently in the form of a playful robot that represents joy amidst the brokenness that is often experienced with inner-city living. This initial idea of using a robot to portray the city was inspired by a Lupe Fiasco's hip hop song "Daydreamin'" where the first verse describes the troubles of Chicago through scenes of a walking project housing building (Muhammad, 2006).

I briefly researched the Tower of the Americas' architecture in my Clay Sculpting class as a first-year student, but I actually wasn't aware of the social/political context in which the tower was built until this semester. A classmate in my Urban Geography course presented on the origins of Hemisphere Park, which was built over a neighborhood that was wiped out during urban renewal by eminent domain. I had an idea that something probably existed at the site

before the park was constructed but I never realized that an entire community was displaced. After learning about this, I almost felt betrayed by the innocent character I had illustrated, which to me represented the city in a positive manner. I was discouraged from using it, but instead, I embraced this aspect of the towers' history and incorporated the most relevant content from Urban Geography related to neighborhood change.

This is where my drawing really came to life. When discussing neoliberalism in *Right to the City*, one of the required texts for the course, Don Mitchell (2003) makes reference to Neil Smith's notion of "revanchism." He summarizes revanchism as an urban movement of neoliberal policy-makers that seek "revenge" on cities through welfare reform; a movement which can be seen in both right-wing and liberal local governments (Mitchell, 2003, p/164). I was interested in what this looked like in San Antonio but I couldn't immediately grasp it from Mitchell's brief discussion of it. I decided to look at Neil Smith's (1996) *The New Urban Frontier*, the book where he introduces his take on "revanchism" in the context of what he terms "the revanchist city."

Smith (1996) explains that the revanchist city is the result of "race/class/gender terror" felt by the white ruling class, which feels threatened by economic downturn and the growing influence of minority groups in the urban setting (p. 211). This reaction against minorities, the working class, homeless people, and the unemployed, who more or less experienced progress in society during the New Deal Keynesian economic model, is visible through the continuation of gentrification, which has become an integral part of the revanchist city (Smith, 1996, p. 46). I quickly realized that Smith's way of describing gentrification fit with my general personification of the city and interest in neighborhood change but I would argue that in a city like San Antonio, this revanchism isn't as explicit as Smith describes. Luckily, Smith also dedicates substantial effort in describing gentrification as the "New Urban Frontier." He cites the language surrounding this "urban frontier" where "urban pioneers", or gentrifiers, see themselves as courageous individuals exploring uncharted land-- which is parallel to the rhetoric of early

exploration into the Western Frontier (Smith, 1996, p. 13). I understood this and loved Smith's way of relating it, and so I wanted my drawing to illustrate something similar. Instead of blatantly seeking revenge or intentionally displacing/harming citizens, my robot is innocently "exploring" a low income neighborhood and bringing change with him.

Now that I had my main character and his actions decided, my focus shifted to the city itself, which would be the backdrop of my illustration. In *Right to the City*, Mitchell (2003) later discusses how "image becomes everything" for the neoliberal city that must compete for investment, which manifests itself in the form of building and incentivizing new tourist attractions, stadiums, restaurants, concert venues, and so on (p. 166). In reading this, I was immediately brought back to a reading from the same Urban Geography course that dealt with this same issue in more detail. Christine Boyer (1992) explains how cities occupy themselves with using architecture and infrastructure to create false images of celebrated spaces for the purpose of accumulating capital while masking other problems. She claims "the aim is theatrical," and continuing with this analogy to describe the city's actions, Boyer (1992) adds:

Architecture and the theater use similar means to design places of pleasure and spectacle, manipulating scenery, ornament, and facades, to underscore the sentiment of their play. However they may be fused or confused, there is of course always a distinction between the represented image of the city and its reality. (p. 184)<sup>1</sup>

This is exactly what I have witnessed in San Antonio but could never express it in words the way she did. My references to the Pearl, Hays Street Bridge, modern condos appearing downtown, and changing storefronts in combination with "the reality" of the inner city is my way of visualizing Boyer's contribution to my understanding of the changing city. Like Smith's comparison to the Western Frontier, I also appreciated Boyer's analogy with theatre; from here I was inspired to take my illustration further my making it into a movie poster.

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<sup>1</sup> Boyer (1992) continues, "But rather than arousing condemnation, this chaotic arrangement and disconnected juxtaposition of city segments is accepted and indeed celebrated as the result of rampant but healthy development" (184).

I will conclude with a detail that I was considering omitting; the puppet strings attached to the robot. This represents my acknowledgement that cities are influenced by global economic factors that pressure them into creating policies that might incentivize gentrification or encourage these false spaces that ignore bigger problems (in this case, a neoliberal capitalist economy in the midst of globalization is the main factor). I do not withhold accountability nor my belief that the city is responsible for protecting the affected communities, but I am aware of several groups and individuals in San Antonio that advocate in the interest of the often overlooked and forgotten.