RECONNECT OUR STREETS

You've heard of institutional racism. What about infrastructural segregation?
Clinton Edminster *talks to a planner who wants to reprogram our city map.*

N EARLY 300 YEARS AGO, GEN. JAMES Oglethorpe understood the import of the public commons for creating community. It's at the heart of the city's design. But get beyond the squares, and you start to see how Henry Ford's "horse-less carriage" changed the way we relate to one another.

Kevin Klinkenberg thinks about these kinds of things in his role as executive director of the Savannah Development and Renewal Authority (SDRA). Since its inception in 1992, SDRA has been tasked with renewing, revitalizing and beautifying distressed areas of the city. But even before Kevin took the job, I'd often see the architect and urban designer hard at work in ThincSavannah's offices, poring over various and fascinating community redevelopment projects.

An avid walker and huge proponent of a vibrant city life aided by thoughtful urban design, Kevin is a progressive realist, a deep thinker, and a shining light of competence on the issues that plague and inspire us. He and I talked about many of those issues as we sat in Starland's Thomas Square Park on a recent, sunny Sunday afternoon.

We started with a question.

***Savannah* Magazine: What can we do to reconnect the segregated areas of Savannah?**

Kevin Klinkenberg: There are two different ways we can approach connections and redevelopment: physical and social.

On the physical side, those are things we can talk about easily. We can understand or reach out and touch them. Breaking down physical barriers between west and east side is the single most important physical act. Part of that is the I-16 flyover. Part of that is the canal district and a whole series of standards to physically connect the neighborhoods so

NEW YEAR'S SOLUTIONS

RECONNECT OUR STREETS

[Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard] is not a barrier where people have to stop and go around. From whichever direction you're coming from, it should feel seamless.

On the social side, it's about continuing to bring people together physically. We can use a street like MLK to unite rather than divide. We can create events that bring people together on a regular basis—to see and know each other more—to break down racial stereotypes and preformed ideas about each other.

We have to operate in both the physical and social worlds. You can't do one without the other.

Any large infrastructure project would face several challenges, such as funding, bureaucracy and public support. It seems that programming events could bring value to our neighborhoods much more immediately.

Yes. Good developers of new communities don't just build streets and homes; they facilitate a community organization and program events within their community. Why? The more a community values its people, the more they'll sell it to the outside world. If people feel connected to each other, they'll act as a sales crew to others around them.

Even though cities aren't managed by one developer, the effort should be the same. Anytime people are valued and feel a sense of pride, not only do they prevent blight, but they also brag to others. And that's important because you want others to come here and invest further in the community.

The other day was a great example of community. All in one day, I manned a booth at an art fair, read *The Magic School Bus* at a book festival, and listened to live local music at house shows throughout the Starland District. I saw people mixing and learning. It was awesome!

That's when people talk about Savannah at its true potential. You get a feeling on a day like that, because we have this gift from 300 years ago that's evolved and changed over time—this remarkable gift of public space and a very social community. That simply doesn't exist within 95 percent of the United States. When people see it, they're blown away by it.

So, if we think of the city as a computer, the streets and squares are its "hardware." The programming is the social planning that puts the hardware to good use.

Right. That's what we are doing at Wells Park (on MLK and West 32nd Street), with the block parties and movie nights. We're continuing to do regular events because regular events bring people together. They bring a sense of pride to a space. And we do that by programming our streets. ■

LOSE THE RACE

the Kroger, shouting, "Don't support the white man!" and those weren't just children. Those were adults, telling the children what to say. Really—we want our children to act in a manner of an upstanding leader, yet we are out there acting as if we have no morals or values? It was deplorable. The black community needs healing, and we also need healing as a city.

What do you hope the new mayor understands about race relations in our city?

Vaughnette: I hope he'll be fair and understand that the community wanted change for the better, not change for change's sake—and not superficial change in which things are actually the same. ■

ENFRANCHISE YOUNG MINDS

There's a book by Anya Kamenetz titled *The Test*, which says that some school districts spend 30 to 40 percent of the school year taking tests or preparing for tests. And these tests don't measure how well anybody integrates information.

So the tests don't accurately measure learning. Do they get in the way of learning?

We put so much pressure on kids that they're scared. If you're mad or scared, the part of your brain called the medulla sends oxygen out to your extremities, and you either want to fight or flee. The connections in your brain usually travel at 247 miles an hour, but when all the oxygen is at your extremities, the connections only travel at 40 miles an hour. So our brains work slower and the capability of learning goes down.

Then what's a more appropriate way of teaching children?

Our education system isn't really built around the way our brains work. Our brains don't store math in one place, history in another, language in another. [School] should be centered on project thinking and interdisciplinary projects instead of separate subjects. Education could start at age 2. From [ages] 2 through 8, school could focus on building vocabulary and proper emotional development, embracing creativity, play and collaboration as necessary for the healthy development of neural connections. Physical activity should be central to each day's curriculum for children to develop the chemicals and hormones necessary to lock down learning.

Sounds a little hectic.

Children, especially boys, need to move and learn. About the time their brains are having this huge learning time, we make them sit still. But they are just not meant to do that.

What about older students?

Integrated, project-oriented learning. Apprenticeship was a form of intellectual weaning. The more skillful and thoughtful the apprentice became, the less he or she would depend on the teacher. That's a more culturally appropriate response to the neurological changes in the adolescent brain than what currently happens in school systems.

Did any of your teachers use those methods?

When I was in the eighth grade, we had a constitutional convention, and we were all representing different parts of the states, so it was all participatory stuff. What I remember is wanting to go to that class. We got to debate, and we were always being loud, though not necessarily right. I like conflict and I think, when handled correctly and respectfully, it helps people learn.

Is that why you emphasize collaboration in learning?

Everybody says we work better when we collaborate. Hardly anybody shows up to a 9-to-5 job where they're working entirely by themselves. But collaboration takes a lot of skills you don't learn in school. It takes a lot of time. It can be really messy. So companies know they should collaborate, but people don't really have the skills or tools to do that well.

And if we don't reconstruct the system?

It's kind of like climate change. We're going to realize we're educating children in the opposite way we should, but by the time we do, I'm afraid we'll be unable to do anything about it. ■