



INSIGHT AWARD

JERUSALEM DEMSAS

STAFF WRITER, THE ATLANTIC

Jerusalem Demsas writes about housing, infrastructure, and how political institutions stymie economic growth at the national level. But if you're active in the New York City housing world, it's certain that someone has forwarded you at least one of her pieces, possibly with a note attached reading, "If only everyone here understood this!"

On topics ranging from homelessness and homeownership to the effect new construction has on affordability – a sober reappraisal of the so-called “gentrification building” – Jerusalem’s work hones in on what public policy looks like in real life, and how it often plays out in ways that are misunderstood or misaligned with common-sense goals.

While her writing draws more from economics than from anecdote or biography, her personal history illustrates the potential of housing to help everyone to reach their full potential – and by contrast, the social costs of allowing this system to fail.

Jerusalem arrived in the U.S. at age three along with her parents, Eritrean asylum seekers escaping civil war in Ethiopia. The family settled in the Maryland suburbs, renting a townhouse in what Jerusalem describes in policy terms as a “high opportunity area” – a safe community with good schools and services. When her parents eventually divorced, she was able to continue to attend her high school because her father was able to find an apartment to rent within walking distance of her high school. She credits her educational path in part to the availability of multifamily rental housing.

Her experience has shaped her commitment to the importance of affordable housing options to help families achieve stability in their communities, and the importance of freedom of movement to both political and economic freedom.

Her focus on the failure of institutions...can be seen as a wake-up call from a new generation.

THE OBVIOUS ANSWER TO HOMELESSNESS

And why everyone's ignoring it

BY JERUSALEM DEMSAS

THE PEOPLE WHO HATE PEOPLE

Of all the objections NIMBY's raise to new housing and infrastructure, perhaps the most risible is that their community is already too crowded.

BY JERUSALEM DEMSAS

Housing Breaks People's Brains

Supply skepticism and shortage denialism are pushing against the actual solution to the housing crisis: building enough homes.

By Jerusalem Demsas

The Real Villain in the Gentrification Story

It's not young, upwardly mobile college grads.

By Jerusalem Demsas

(Above) A selection of headlines from Jerusalem's work in *The Atlantic* – available at theatlantic.com

Reading a paper from Yale Law professor David Schleicher during a college class on labor market economics activated these ideas for her in a more organized manner. This led her to begin unpacking the extensive economic and political science literature about housing, local politics, and cultural norms that had shaped her life (and all of ours). As her career progressed, Jerusalem continued to dig into the macroeconomic and individual-scale consequences of economically successful regions' failure to provide enough housing for everyone seeking it. This area of investigation has only become more relevant as our housing crisis has deepened.

Jerusalem combines the analytical chops of a policy researcher with the dogged attention of a journalist. In an environment where conflicts over housing and development too often draw attention as political scimmages rather than as public policy debates, she foregrounds the broader significance of these conflicts. Her focus on the failure of institutions to address mounting crises in housing, climate, and other arenas can be seen as a wake-up call from a new generation. If she seems impatient for change, you need only read further to understand why.