



Paul Badger

Providence RI

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"Invisible Borders" 2000, 36" x 48", aluminum
See documentation [below](#).

I consider much of my work to be agitprop (a word derived from agitation & propaganda), which also has a playful but serious sense of humor and which attempts to appeal to a wide audience, most of whom are not that aware of the art world. I enjoy addressing political and social issues and I borrow much of my imagery and my style from advertising and public sign systems. My goal is not to aestheticize or elevate pop imagery to function as high art. However, I instead try to put my images and text back into play in an environment similar to the one in which they originated.

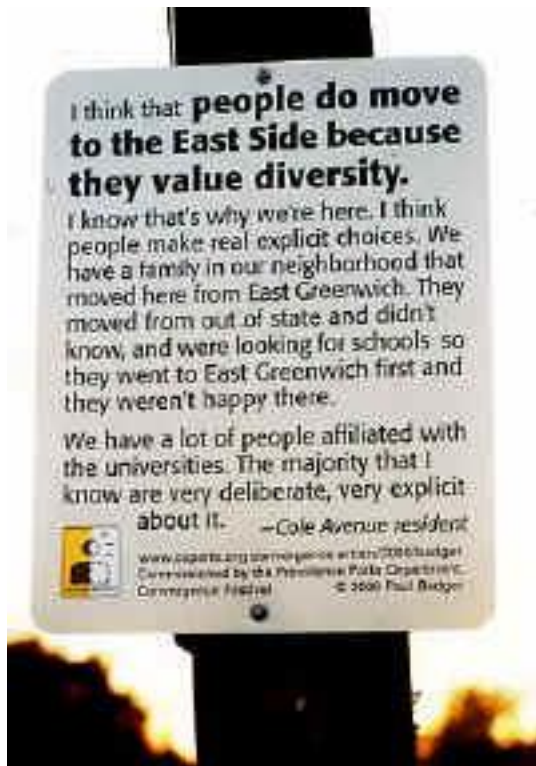
In my work for Convergence, I'm going to look for two communities between which a main street functions as something of a dividing line. I'm going to spend some time talking to people on both sides of the street about how they relate to people from across the street and some of the things in which they and their neighborhood takes pride. Next I'll go into the studio and try to work with this material I gather in the interviews in the designs of ten street signs. The signs will then be posted back on the street which inspired the project in the first place. I may be somewhat mischievous in the way I post the signs, for example putting up some quotations and symbols on the opposite side of the street from where they originated. It is my hope that the signs will serve as a focus for discussion and dialog between and among the two neighborhoods and relate to a larger audience as well.

I have to also confess that the project may blow up. I'm trafficking around the edge of stereotyping, by asking one group to characterize another, and there is the real possibility to offend if the work miscommunicates. I think most people will admit that honest conversations about class and race are very, very rare in America, so addressing these issues in public, as I wish to, has the potential to be explosive. But the project also has the potential to do something quite extraordinary and that is to function as the catalyst for a more truthful discussion of these very difficult issues which are so essential for Americans and are so often ignored, glossed over or lied about in the media.

Paul Badger has worked with public signage and display systems for many years, creating billboards, bumper stickers, street signs, covert projections in movie theaters, protest banners and media hoaxes. His work has recently been exhibited at Mass MOCA and at Spaces in Cleveland. He currently teaches courses in electronic media at Brown University.

Text and Images From the Invisible Borders Installation Hope Street, Providence Rhode Island September - November 2000

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I think that **people do move to the East Side because they value diversity.** I know that's why we're here. I think people make really explicit choices. We have a family in our neighborhood that moved here from East Greenwich. They moved from out of state and didn't know, and were looking for schools, so they went to East Greenwich first and they weren't happy there. We have a lot of people affiliated with the universities. The majority that I know are very deliberate, very explicit about it.

-Cole Avenue resident

A lot of what makes up gentrification, in the right proportion, is really good for a neighborhood. If you have a neglected house, that some absentee landlord has been renting out to dozens of people, and somebody wants to buy it and fix it up, that helps the neighborhood. But I don't understand why there isn't some tax relief for the long-term residents. Why do elderly people have to see their taxes go up if they have lived in the house for fifty years? And why not some relief for people who are renting? I don't understand why it can't be a good thing if it's done in a controlled way.

-Hope Street resident

I called the police one morning for some suggestions on how to deal with the house next door. There was a constant level of illegal or disruptive activity by some of the tenants in the house and a lack of respect for their neighbors. I had lost some of my tenants over this so it was costing me money. The building owner's management company was totally unresponsive to my concerns about their tenants and I was getting nowhere. The police suggested they send a cruiser out but the officer who arrived at my door had an attitude. "Why'd you call the police", he asked. After I explained my problem he said, "Don't call the police for nothing, if you call the police for nothing we won't come when you need us." He asked me, didn't I know what kind of neighborhood I was moving into when I bought the house and suggested if I couldn't get results by talking to the landlord maybe I should think about moving out. "This isn't Blackstone Boulevard" he said. When I asked him what that meant he said, "I'm just telling you this isn't Blackstone Boulevard, this is Camp Street, and that is Pleasant Street." It wasn't a very fruitful conversation. He disrespected the entire neighborhood, it wasn't just me, as though people that live in poor neighborhoods, minority neighborhoods have no right to expect to live with dignity, in some sort of comfort and quality of life.



-Camp Street resident

"This sign was spray painted (effaced not graffitied) about three weeks after it was erected."



Many of us have been here for years and our kids have grown, and the question is, can younger- I'd like to see younger families with toddlers and school age children—that shows vitality- moving in, as people move out. It would be awful, if housing prices went up such that you didn't get young families with children. Or if it required two income professional families with no children.

-Taber Avenue resident

When I bought my house back in 1981, I was going to live on the second and third floors and rent the first floor. I got a lot of calls and the question would always be, "Is it east or west of Hope street?" I had to think at first and finally said, "Well, I'm west of Hope."

And they'd say, "Oh thank you" and they'd hang up, or "I'm not interested in that area". Then I started to try to explain to people "but it's three houses from Hope Street and all you need to do is cross the street and you're on the east of Hope". But most of the time they'd say "but I'm not interested in that area".

At first I didn't realize what they were saying and thought they were just trying to get an idea of which direction they would have to go. Then I realized one day that's not at all what they were asking me.

-Duncan Street resident


Out of twelve sales I've made in the Mount Hope neighborhood this year, only one was to a black family and all the rest were to white families. That neighborhood is changing quickly. The dividing line of Hope Street is changing. Now the dividing line is going to be Camp Street and below. It's already happening up to Camp Street. They are replacing all the tenants and homeowners that have been there for twenty years or more, and it's going to get across Camp Street too, although it might be five years or more. Eventually all the poorer people that are in the area will be displaced. Now I don't know where they're going to move to but they are going to be displaced from the Mount Hope area.

-real estate agent



The people who are interested in property values are very distressed at my neighbor's desire for a blacktopped front yard and a chain-link fence. I'm of the impression that this is a woman who worked hard all her life, and if she has this blacktop and chain-link dream, why should we stand in the way of her dream? If I lived on the other side of Hope Street there would probably be less tolerance for my eccentric behavior. There's times I get busy and I don't pull the weeds in my yard and there are times when I have lots of noisy children going in and out of my house. One of the things I like about our neighborhood is there's an implied tolerance of noise. It's not expected to be a parklike atmosphere, and we all understood that when we moved here. On the other side of Hope Street people are more dreaming of living on Blackstone Boulevard and they wished they had a parklike setting and it doesn't always work out that way.

—Forest Street resident

 www.900.618.org or info@900.618.org
 Created by the Providence Parks Department,
 Campaign for Forest Hill © 2000 Paul Sticker

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moved here. On the other side of Hope Street people are more dreaming of living on Blackstone Boulevard and they wished they had a parklike setting and it doesn't always work out that way.

-Forest Street resident

The thing that for me is the biggest issue in the community **is the schools**. The schools divide us. The majority of kids in my neighborhood don't go to King and so what happens is you have a fractured neighborhood because of the lack of support for the local school as a school of choice. People are sending their kids to different schools so it divides the community because kids aren't going to school with their neighbors. There is a private school tradition here and certainly the private schools preceded the crisis in public education. But I think the public school systems are the number one problem in Rhode Island. I think it even underlies the economic problems in Rhode Island and it just exacerbates a lot of the racial problems and divisiveness. -


Cole Avenue resident

Somebody
wants the drug trade here. I went so far as to accuse the police of "maybe you're not trying to get it out of my neighborhood, because if you get it out of my neighborhood, where's it going to go?" But it's getting to the point where it's going to be cleaned up, because of the mall.

The big stores are coming into the mall. They've got to have places for their people to live. They're going to live as close as they can to where they work.

Up here it's not only the mall but it's the college students. There's more and more of them coming in. People are buying houses so they can put the college students into them. They make a lot of money on them and it's guaranteed money.

So I don't think this stuff is long to be here.
—Pleasant Street resident



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Commissioned by the Providence Parks Department
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Originally there were basketball courts on the ends, with the tennis courts in the center at Nathan Bishop. I had had some calls from neighbors about the banging of the basketball and the echo and about fixing the fence, which was old and rusty.

The design of the new courts had the same layout, with the basketball courts on the end but I had pressure from Elmgrove Avenue to put the basketball courts in the center, further away from the houses. They didn't want lights, or people there at night. We ended up with one basketball court instead of two and we had these leftover basketball poles and backboards. So we arrived at a solution with the school and with some of the neighbors, where the extra backboards faced the street on each end and we put them up, thinking that was going to accommodate the school.



But I got calls from Taber Avenue saying, it's going to bring people down to play, **and it's going to be noisy**. I think part of it subtly was, "It's bringing the element from Mount Hope down. They have basketball courts there on Camp Street and Cypress. They don't need to come over here," that type of thing. But the basketball courts are used. When you go by, there is usually somebody playing basketball.

So we ended up taking the hoops off the end backboards. There was pressure, so there is some tension there. Part of the neighbor's anger was, that they felt they had no cooperation from the school around managing the kids when they entered and left school, so they were angry that I was giving the school something. That's what I felt anyway, in the feedback that I received.

-City Councilperson

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