I just finished up Ian Buruma’s and Avishai Margalit’s excellent book, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*, and it struck me that we need to think of Donald Trump’s despoilation of the environment in a broader perspective: his administration seeks to fundamentally change both the natural and the human environment.

Trump clearly has declared war on that half of the country that didn’t vote for him, and many of his own devoted followers as well. One aspect that has not received attention so far, however, has been an assault on ***cities.*** This is the most anti-urban administration in the nation’s history. And that carries with it a dark and ugly pedigree.

It’s not just rhetoric, the constant harping on supposedly crime-ridden and dirty cities (and like pretty much everything else that emanates from the man’s mouth, it is false). Rather, it is the precise way in which his administration is attacking cities’ economic basis.

It has become something of cliché in local economic development scholarship that a central basis for urban economies are “Eds and Meds” – big universities and major health care facilities (which can be part of universities but do not have to be). “Eds” generate not only employment and productivity, but associated industries and businesses that spin off of them. The classic example is Hewlett-Packard, founded in Palo Alto by two recent Stanford graduates then working on a fellowship at their alma mater. Because cities have high concentrations of populations, health care facilities can serve a lot of patients, and then can do the research that then can

create new businesses, and so on.

And of course what are two industries that the administration has focused on destroying? Eds and meds. The attacks on Columbia, Harvard, Brown, and many others are not targeted at anti-semitism (it is now obvious that the administration could not care less about attacks on Jews or Israel); instead, they function as a way of destroying medical schools. The administration has ended student loan forgiveness. It is a direct attack on cities’ economic base.

Combine this with specific attempts to destroy congestion pricing, and end federal housing assistance, and it is really full-out war on urban life.

So who cares? The GOP base is rural areas and exurbs. He sees his job to hurt people who aren’t his base. What’s the big deal?

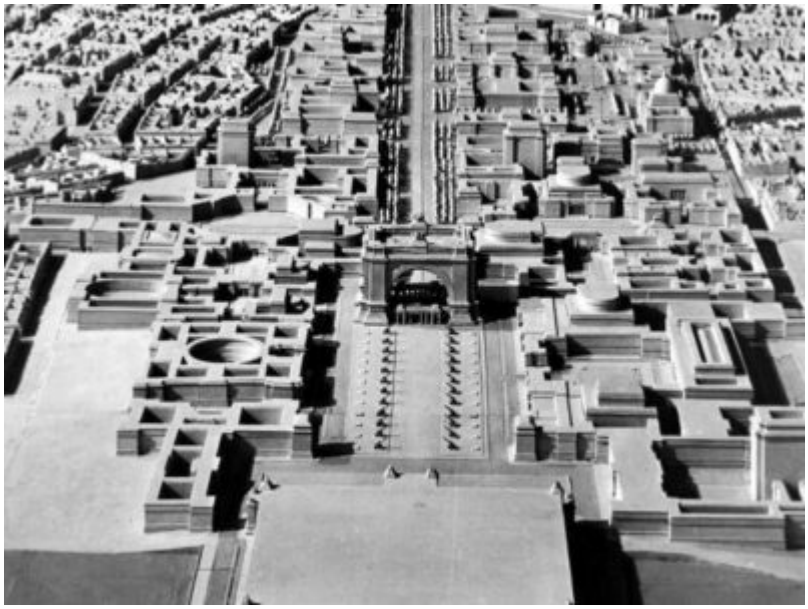
That brings us back to Buruma and Margalit.

Occidentalism appeared in 2004, and it argued (successfully in my view) that much of what we think of as Islamic extremism actually was an example of an anti-Western ideology that occurred in many countries and in many guises. They open their book not with Muslim clerics but rather with World War II Japanese intellectuals. Nazis of course are there, as well as Mao Zedong and intellectual and ideological movements around the globe.

Frantz Fanon: Cities are full of

“knaves and traitors.”

And one of the principal facets of Occidentalism is a hatred of cities. And this isn’t solely because they are supposed dens of vice; rather, it is their very vibrancy and freedom, their diversity, their willingness to break taboos, and their generation of commerce (instead of the crony capitalism favored by Trump). They obviously do not support the alleged values of sturdy rural peasantry, which is one reason why Mao Zedong sent tens of millions Down to the Countryside. Nazis hated Berlin and Paris as centers of bourgeois decadence. Frantz Fanon said that cities were full of “traitors and knaves.”



Welthauptstadt Germania: A Fake City For Those Who Hate Cities

Instead, Occidentalists want to remake cities in a new image: the Nazis wanted to destroy old Berlin and create *Welthauptstadt Germania*, a sort of fascist architectural paradise, with broad lanes for military parades and homages to the Fuhrer. Sound familiar?

It seems to me that this also points to another avenue of resistance: simply advocating for urban life, helping to build good and resilient cities, embracing city-ness as a value in and of itself. Trump and his henchmen hate cities. The rest of us should love them.

“The truth is,” Deep Throat tells Bob Woodward in *All The President’s Men,* “that

these aren’t very bright guys, and things got out of control.” And certainly no one looking at the current regime in DC would call them brilliant. But there is an overarching ideology, and it seeks to destroy not only governmental institutions, and the health of the planet, but the very ways in which we live and work and interact. The destruction of city life is a key aspect of this ideology. And it is waiting to seize enough state power to achieve its goal.