

The Many Faces of Anti-Homeless Architecture

By Nicole Arcieri



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Many cities across the United States are strewn with anti-homeless architecture. Have you ever seen a park bench with an arm rest in the middle of it? Perhaps you have seen some decorative street dividers splayed down a city sidewalk and wondered what their purpose served. The answer is simple: city planning, and design ironically revolves entirely around the homeless community. These structural elements, however, are meant to hurt, not help people that are homeless.

An article by Brittany Hambleton of The Hearty Soul Team lists 10 examples of anti-homeless architecture that may have gone unquestioned and unnoticed to many for quite some time. Some of the examples are in regard to storm grate design. Storm grates are warm and since people that are homeless may face harsh and freezing cold weather conditions in some areas, it is

natural that they may want to lay or sit on a storm grate for warmth. Unfortunately, many storm grates are either raised up off the ground to prevent people that are homeless from laying down on them. Some are draped with storm covers and others are designed with fencing on top of them.

Another example of anti-homeless architecture involves placing boulders underneath bridges. Many people in the homeless community have sought shelter under bridges as they can serve as a safer alternative to sleeping on a sidewalk. This type of design clearly deters people that are homeless from taking shelter under bridges simply because they physically can't. There are also those pesky street dividers. It may seem like they are there solely for decorative purposes, but in fact, their main purpose is to eliminate space on sidewalks so people that are homeless cannot sleep in these areas.

These and many other design elements are made to ostracize people that are homeless and keep them out of the public eye. Out of sight, out of mind. What anti-homeless architecture fails to do, however, is eliminate homelessness. It may seem like such structural elements do just that, but in fact, they only hide the truth about the homelessness crisis in the U.S., and that is the fact that it exists. No one should ever have to resort to sleeping under a bridge or on a park bench at night, but the truth of the matter is that people do because they simply do not have any other option. Homeless shelters can be dangerous and overcrowded and assistance is generally very limited to homeless communities otherwise.

People that are homeless are underrepresented and ignored. However, when it comes to city planning and design, they are the first people to be considered, only so they can be ignored further. Anti-homeless architecture is unethical and inherently classist. It is a temporary "solution" to a pressing, concrete problem that can be seen across the U.S. It is time for cities

around the nation to divert funding away from anti-homeless architecture and to instead invest in homeless communities to enact real change, not just superficial change.