

The Public Square for March 2026

Attention Citizens!

In case anybody missed it, the next video is out on Early Access on both [Patreon](#) and [YouTube](#) RIGHT NOW.

This month I wanted to take some time to provide some additional context to certain parts of the video. I'll provide the timestamp in case you want to play along at home.

“This remarkable stability meant that Neolithic villages had millennia to mature, and as they matured they generally settled on the same design.” (1:48)

There has been A LOT of research done on the design of these old Neolithic villages. In my earliest drafts I had more of this included in the video, but in the end it resulted in me rattling off a long list of types of buildings, and explaining where they were located in Neolithic villages and why. In the end, not TERRIBLY interesting. Plus, the point of this video is to talk about the evolution of cities, getting stuck in the Neolithic Age seemed counterproductive. So I cut most of that stuff, and the above sentence is all that remains of like 5 long paragraphs explaining how Neolithic villages were designed.

The thing that I found interesting about this is that there seemed to be a “perfect” design for Neolithic villages that virtually all villages gravitated towards.

“In Mesopotamia, we know that at least 5% of the population of cities were slaves, and as these cities became more and more wealthy, the number of slaves tended to increase.” (6:07)

I don't think I made this as clear in the video as I wished, but what I was trying to get across was that the first cities were about 5% slaves, and that the percentage of slaves increased almost linearly alongside wealth, until ancient Rome was something like 33% slaves. Maybe more. Sometimes people think that ancient societies had slaves because they were so poor. The quick little argument that I was trying to sneak in here was that ancient societies actually had slaves because they were rich. And the more rich they got, the more slaves there were.

“The old Mesopotamian cities evolved to be top down and fragile, while the new Greek cities evolved to be bottom up and resilient. By the 5th century BCE, Greece's complex political institutions meant that Greek cities could field armies 2-3x larger than similarly sized Mesopotamian cities.” (7:30)

This is a straight up political argument that I'm making here, but I strongly believe it to be true. What set Greek cities apart was that they could mobilize the entire city when under threat. They had an "extra gear" that Mesopotamian cities lacked, they could go SICKO MODE when necessary. The fact that they had that "extra gear" was way more important to Greece's survival than resources or geography or individual leaders or anything else. At least that's my opinion.

"Walking, biking, horseback, rail, car, dirigible, space ship, Zahavi found that people will happily make the trip so long as the travel time is no more than 30 minutes each way." (9:40)

Originally this little montage included a picture of the moon landing, but as I was going over the video and making last minute changes I was like "this 'aint right, there 'aint no way I'm putting an American flag in this thing," so I replaced it with good ol' Chris Hadfield with a Canadian flag, lol. I think that was literally the last change I made to this video before I uploaded it.

"15 years later, an Italian physicist named Cesare Marchetti popularized Zahavi's discovery in his paper "Anthropological Invariants in Travel Behavior," (nerd alert), and henceforth this principle became known as Marchetti's Constant." (10:09)

Okay, THIS SECTION is basically the core of what I cut out of the "Work" video in 2023.

In that video I had a 10 minute detour into a section called "Marchetti's Constant," but it wasn't strictly related to the other arguments that I was trying to make in the "Work" video, so I cut the whole thing at the last minute. But I always thought that the idea was so interesting, so I thought to myself, "I'm going to come back around and make a full Marchetti's Constant video at some point." And I did! This is that video!

The "Work" video was published in September 2023, and ever since then I've had the first draft of "The Marchetti's Constant Video" sitting on my desk, on top of a stack of notes and research. I've probably looked at it every day since September 2023. As I write this sentence, it occurs to me that I can finally put all of that stuff away! I've regained a corner of my desk, wow, what a day!

I re-read the original September 2023 draft of the "The Marchetti's Constant Video," and it's hilarious that I don't think 1 sentence survived from that draft into the final video. Everything has been rewritten top to bottom, and everything is in a totally different order, it's

almost unrecognizable. The only stuff that survives from the original draft is when I go around the map and give a list of Bronze Age cities and their walking radius.

“I mentioned this briefly years ago in the video “Work,” but it’s worth repeating here that human brains love 30 minute increments.” (11:25)

In my first 5 or so drafts of the script it just says this entire section is just represented by the sentence “DO THE 30 MINUTE THING HERE,” lol.

“We find that the same 30 minute benchmark was important even in the semi-permanent seasonal settlements that predated the first Neolithic villages.” (12:05)

It took me, no joke, about 50 attempts to get this sentence clean when recording the audio. “Semi-permanent seasonal settlements.” When working on the animation, I would cringe every time this sentence came up, I thought my delivery was so terrible and awkward. But I just listened to it right now and it sounds totally normal. I guess I just had PTSD, I don’t know what I was thinking.

“What made Rome unique was that the extreme amount of wealth and treasure and slaves flowing into the city allowed for it to grow beyond the Pomerium into a megacity of more than 1 million inhabitants. This made Rome way too big.” (13:45)

The very first version of this script from September 2023 included a section about Julius Caesar banning wagons from entering the city of Rome during daylight hours. I think this was in the year 45 BCE. He did this because, as I mention in the final video, Rome was a deeply dysfunctional city, and the traffic from the wagons made it dangerous and cumbersome to get around.

After 45 BCE, wagons could only enter Rome at night, but this created brand new problems. It became EXTREMELY DANGEROUS to go anywhere at night, the chances of being run over by a wagon became very high. Additionally, it was LOUD, people at the time complained about not being able to sleep with all of the wagon activity going on in the middle of the night.

Caesar’s ban didn’t really fix the fundamental problem with Rome. The city was way too big, each wagon would be stuck navigating the narrow streets of Rome for hours and hours. These were the first traffic jams. Rome’s streets simply could not accommodate the huge number of wagons that were needed to keep the city functioning.

A couple of centuries later, Hadrian tried to fix this problem by putting a cap on the number of wagons that could enter the city every night. This obviously didn't fix the problem either. In fact, they NEVER fixed the problem. They just slowly moved the administrative centre of the Empire to smaller and more functional cities like Milan.

Like I said, this was all in the original September 2023 script, and I CANNOT BELIEVE that it did not make it into the final video. The focus in the final video is all about the walking radius of Rome and the size of the Pomerium. This thing about "Roman Traffic Jams" didn't really fit, I don't talk about traffic anywhere else in the video. So this cornerstone bit from the September 2023 script had to go.

"Lewis Mumford, a 20th century historian specializing in the history of the modern city, summed this change up in one sentence. "The nature and the purpose of the city had been completely forgotten." (18:55)

I had a lot of Lewis Mumford quotes to choose from, here's another one that I ended up cutting. "Thus capitalism, by its very nature, undermined local autonomy as well as local self-sufficiency, and it introduced an element of instability [...] capitalism tended to dismantle the whole structure of urban life and place it upon a new impersonal basis: money and profit." I later chose to steer away from the local autonomy argument that he makes so I didn't include this quote, but I still like it.

"Back in old Medieval Europe, housing took up about 10% of a working person's income. Costs were fixed and consistently low. The thing that made Medieval workers lose sleep at night was the price of food, which consumed about 50% of a worker's income. That's why there were riots whenever the price of food spiked." (20:40)

I hinted at this in a Q&A a couple of months ago, I FORCED this statistic into this video. I think about this ALL THE TIME. As a society we've basically solved the food scarcity problem, but it's been 1:1 replaced by a housing scarcity problem. 600 years ago it was pretty common for poor people to spend over 50% of their income on food, and today it's [pretty common](#) for poor people to spend over 50% of their income on rent. They've just swapped places. Imagine how rich you and I and everybody we know would be if we could get back to spending 10% of our income on housing. God, what a dream.

But alas, nobody is interested in solving this problem, it's not going to happen in this lifetime.

The new industrial slums and their adjacent factories spent all day burning coal and belching poisonous black soot into the air. The soot got all over people's clothes, into the

soil, into the water, into people's homes, and even into their lungs. We now know that prolonged exposure to this soot causes permanent brain damage, and everybody in the industrial slums was exposed. (27:38)

I figured out how to squeeze some environmentalism into this video, let's gooooo. I tried to put it as simply as possible so that it might stick in the minds of history enthusiasts who never ever think about the environment.

In only 60 years, New York City had increased its population by 10x, had industrialized its economy, and in doing so had become one of the richest cities in the world. And yet over the same time period, the the living conditions of working people was declining, and because of this, infant mortality doubled. New York became rich, but it had to step over the bodies of tens of thousands of children to get there. (29:45)

I try to avoid talking too much about the United States in my videos, but I figured that the context was so horrific and negative that it was okay in this one case, lol. Plus, the health data for New York City was excellent, I struggled to find an equally good dataset for a different city to replace it with.

In the final video I say they "step over the bodies of tens of thousands of children," but in the earlier drafts the line was "sacrificed tens of thousands of children on the altar of capitalism." That line goes hard as hell, but I decided that it's a little too theatrical when you're talking about the real deaths of real children, plus it's not entirely accurate. So I changed it to "step over the bodies," which is still pretty theatrical, but it's slightly more accurate. "Sacrificed on the altar" sounds like they were killed on purpose. "Step over the bodies" sounds like they were killed through neglect.

Sometimes you agonize over little turns of phrase that exactly zero people will notice or care about in the final video, lol.

"Working people did not begin to see the benefits of industrialization until well into the 20th century." (30:50)

The first drafts to all of my videos are always VERY LONG AND BORING, and then I figure out my arguments and areas of focus as I edit the script and whittle it down.

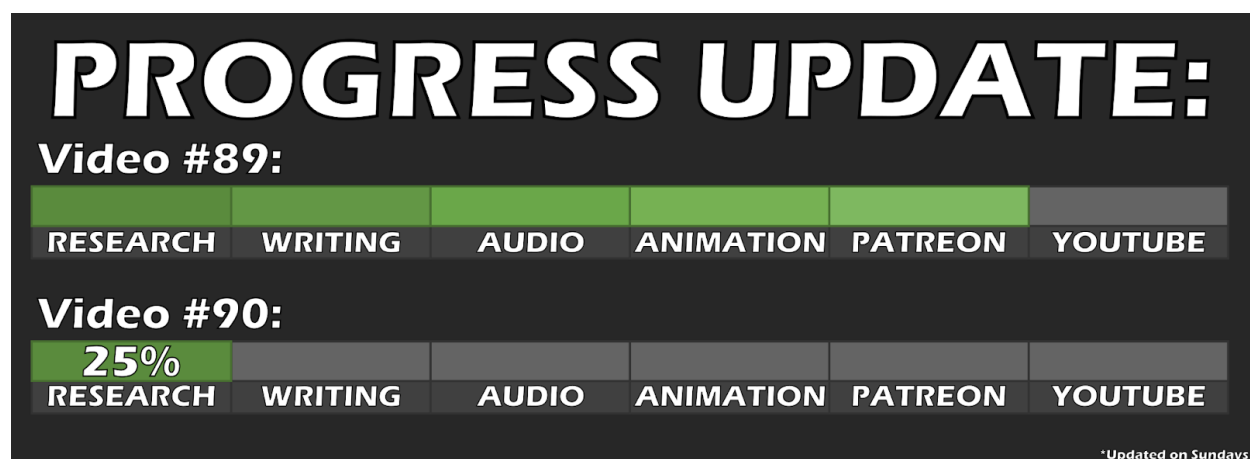
The first draft for this video included a long section about the automobile and the evolution of suburbs in the 20th century. The arguments boiled down to... cities weren't designed for cars. It's true, but it's not particularly novel or surprising or interesting. I cut it pretty early into my editing process. I felt that I wanted to focus on Industrialization and the

declining standards of living in the 19th century, including the infant mortality and the reduced life expectancy bits. Getting into the 20th century, with its increasing standard of living, would have been a totally new argument, and it would have been a distraction from the central point of the video.

However, there were some GREAT Lewis Mumford quotes that came out of this research that I wasn't able to use. Mumford was writing in 1961, so he was seeing the development of 20th century suburbs first-hand, and he was not impressed.

“In the mass movement into suburban areas a new kind of community was produced, which caricatured both the historic city and the archetypical suburban refugee: a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to the common mold, manufactured in the central metropolis. Thus the ultimate effect of suburban escape in our time is ironically, a low-grade uniform environment from which escape is impossible.”

Mumford makes this point, which I think is very clever, that people who live in cities help to create the culture, whereas people who live in suburbs are merely consumers or observers of the culture. And so as people in the middle-class all flee to the suburbs, the people left to influence the culture will be all of the rich people who can afford to live in the cities. This is a thought that never would have occurred to me, but it seems true.



Books I've Recently Enjoyed:

- **The Gathering Storm (1948), by Winston Churchill**

- Here we go, entering my World War 2 era. Winston Churchill wrote a 6 volume history of the war between 1948 and 1953, he famously won the Nobel Prize in Literature for it, and it's ALWAYS been on the long list of books I want to read. Well, now it's happening. This is volume 1.

It's written in a really fun and entertaining way, I think. Churchill has that populist impulse, and it comes across in his writing. As the action ramps up it almost goes day-by-day, which is really appealing. Obviously he's able to include all of his private correspondence and communication with other politicians, which is a great resource.

Obviously to an extent it's a work of propaganda, he's trying to write the first draft of his own legacy. He kinda yadda-yaddas the entire Spanish Civil War, which is pretty amusing. It clearly doesn't interest him much, and it quite fit into the larger narrative he's trying to create of himself as the great anti-Nazi crusader. He also kinda yadda-yaddas some of his electoral ups and downs in the 1920s and 1930s, I was surprised at how briefly the all-important election of 1935 is covered. Blink and you'll miss it.

ALL THAT BEING SAID, it's very good. I just finished volume 1, which ends in May 1940. I'm taking a brief Churchill break between books, but volume 2 should be a banger.

- **The Black Monday Murders (2016), by Jonathan Hickman**

- Best comic book I've read in a long while. It's about... the entire financial system being run by... a secret society of immortal billionaires who practice blood magic and swear allegiance to the evil god Mammon? What a sentence. It's TRAGICALLY unfinished, and I suspect that it will never be finished, but it's still worth reading, it's excellent.

Films I've Recently Enjoyed:

- **Nirvana the Band the Show the Movie (2026)**

- OKAY I had never seen this show before, I never even saw a trailer for this movie, I had no context at all, I just heard that it was good and went in blind. Can't remember the last time I laughed this much in a theatre. I didn't even know the hook/gimmick for the movie that they show in all of the trailers, so when it happened in the movie I was genuinely shocked, lol.

I have since watched the webseries and the TV show. 10/10 perfect no notes.

Music I've Recently Enjoyed:

- **David Bowie**
 - I usually listen to an album while I'm cooking, and for the last 2 weeks it's been **Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars (1972)** all day every day no skips no stops no nothin.

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