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### Hartford Briefly Seen

Cecelia Lagomarsino

*Trinity College, Hartford Connecticut*

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# Hartford Briefly Seen

Cecelia Lagomarsino  
Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut

## Hartford Briefly Seen

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Cecelia Lagomarsino

As I stepped out onto the street at 1:00 pm on a Tuesday, I thought I knew what to expect of this city. Before starting this “Walk the City” assignment for the Cities program, my view of Hartford was similar to that of my own capital city of Albany, New York. Although capital cities are generally thought of as places of legislation and governmental progress, I had assumed that the relationship between any capital city’s structure and its inhabitants was a somewhat blighted one through my experience of Albany. However, because my preconceived notion of Hartford was founded solely upon some historical knowledge of the place and the perspective of another city, my initial understanding of the space and its inhabitants was proven incorrect through the actual experience of walking in the city.

Throughout my five blocks of exploration into Hartford, I became progressively more interested in the dichotomy between old versus new architecture as well as how the elements of the natural world were dispersed throughout the city. This idea of contrasting architectural styles can be seen most directly in the interaction between the “Old State House” and its surroundings. While there is no doubt that the classical architecture of the State House and its gleaming golden dome are at the central point of the city square, the duality of Hartford as a historic and modern agglomeration of structures cannot be missed through the reminder of the (presumably insurance agency) high rise that monolithically stands directly behind the State House (see Figure 1). The duality in architectural themes and overall culture of Hartford can further be emphasized by Pablo Delano’s work.

In *Hartford Seen*, written by Delano, we see how the interplay of Caribbean cultures and typical New England structures helps to further emphasize the multifaceted nature of the buildings present in Hartford. The interaction between vibrant Caribbean colors and the more stolid character of New England facades can be seen especially on pages 40-41 of *Hartford Seen*, and displays the multitude of differences that are present not only among the inhabitants of Hartford, but the very nature of the social interactions within the city space.

The role of the natural world within Hartford is also particularly interesting to me because of how foreign nature typically is to the concept of a city. When I first stepped out onto the curb of Prospect Street, I was immediately surprised by the abundance of trees and other living things that I passed with quick succession, along with how frequently dispersed the natural world was throughout the city. Contrasting with the urban blight that I had previously associated with capital cities, the nature that is present throughout the city blocks of Hartford is truly remarkable. It almost appears as if the seemingly random designation of vines and shrubbery is the connective tissue that encompasses all of the conflicting points of the city; where the Caribbean cultures of Hartford meet the regional history of Connecticut in *Hartford Seen*, there are images of plants and nature dashed across the building. Furthermore, the new architecture of insurance high rises often meets the old architecture of churches and state buildings at the natural edge created by lines of tree trunks and branches (see Figure 4).

Therefore, it seems that the greenery itself helps to connect the inhabitants’ experiences with the city to their surroundings. Through the uninhibited extension of the natural world between each seemingly spliced city segment and structural incongruence, the city of Hartford is formed.

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## **Bibliography**

Delano, Pablo. Hartford Seen. Wesleyan University Press, 2020.

Appendix

Figure 1: Nature: *Where the Past and the Present Meet*



Figure 2: *Sauce is Extra*



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Figure 3: *Reflections Through Modernity*



Figure 4: *Hartford in an Image*

