



Class Three

Urban Policy ***4211/6606***

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Class Three

The Kind of Problem the City Is

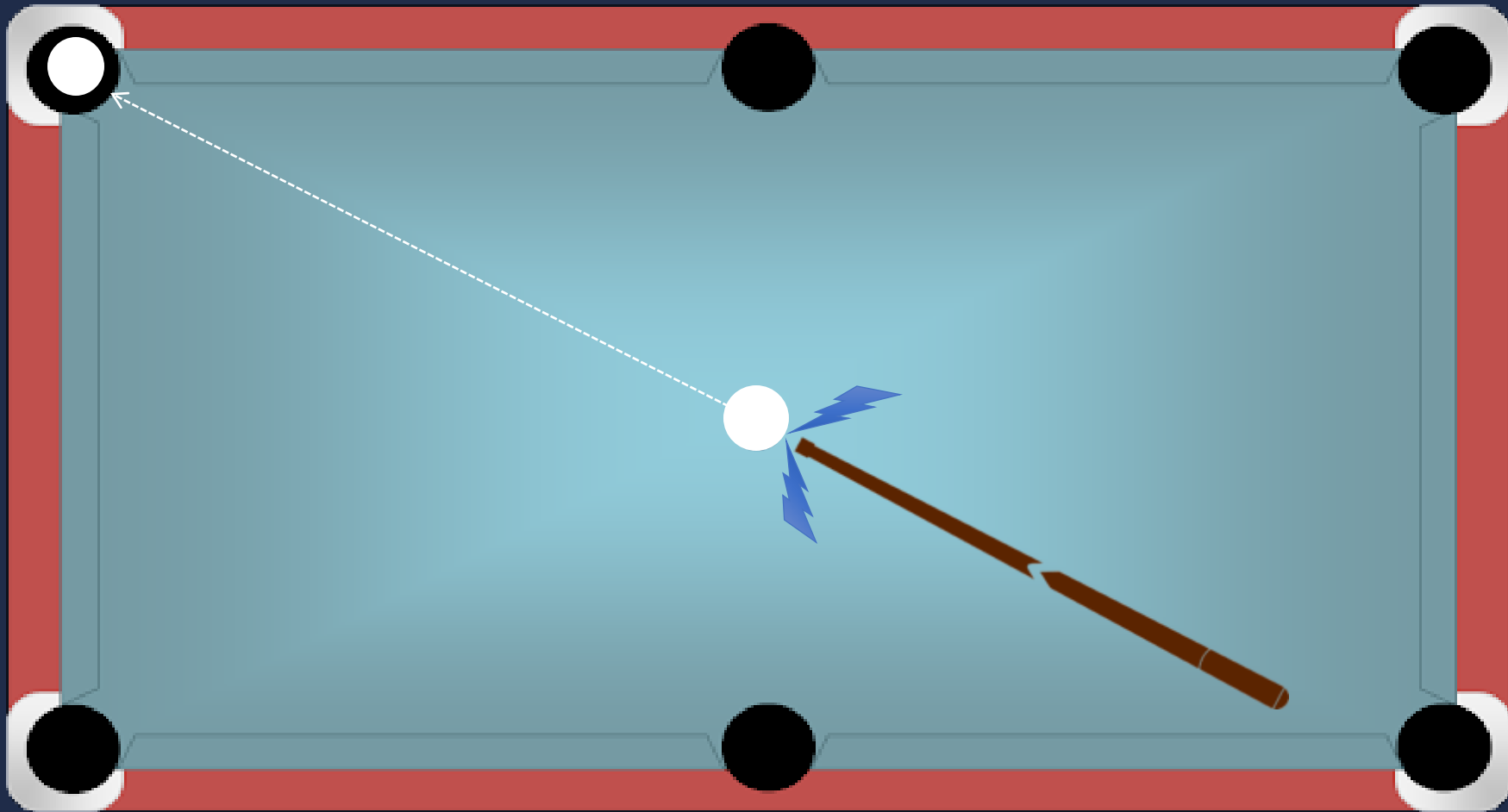
Cities provide the benefits of urbanization, but not to everyone

- Cities are networked that provide resiliency and are subject to increasing returns to scale
 - But cities do not deliver the benefits of urbanization **uniformly**
 - Failing schools, crime, health disparities and the lack of economic mobility – **are concentrated in specific neighborhoods**
- These outcomes are a consequence of public policies and private actions that have **impeded the city's ability to function as a network**
 - Segregating by race and concentrating poverty has **significantly reduced the value of urban life for mostly Black residents**
- In order solve the problem – in order to reverse the impact of this legacy – we need to understand **what kind of problem** we are dealing with
- “Defining the problem” is where we have gone astray

Jacobs borrowed Weaver's typology to define the kind of problem a city is

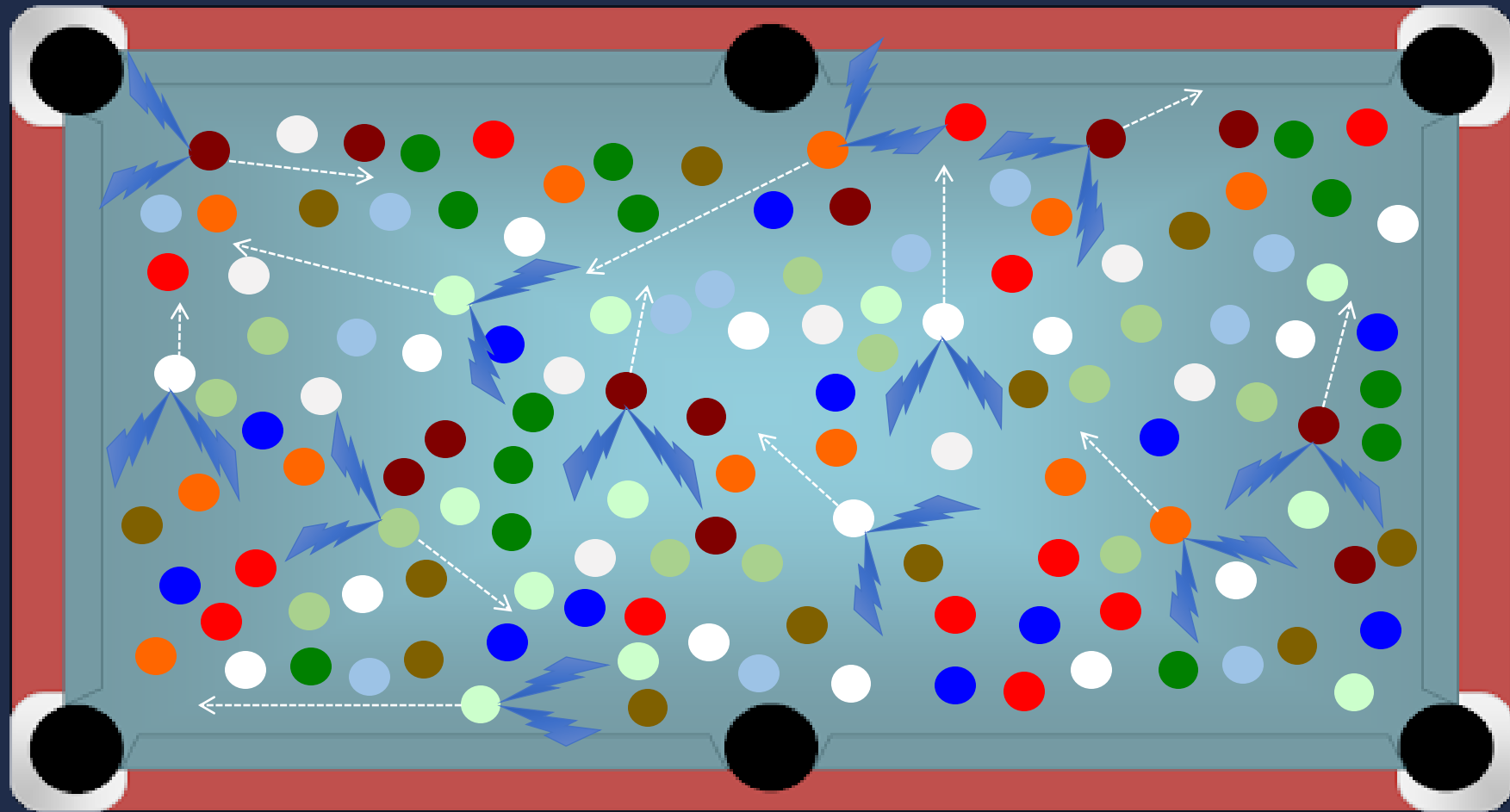
Problems of Simplicity

$F=ma$



Although some systems behave chaotically, they lend themselves to statistical analysis

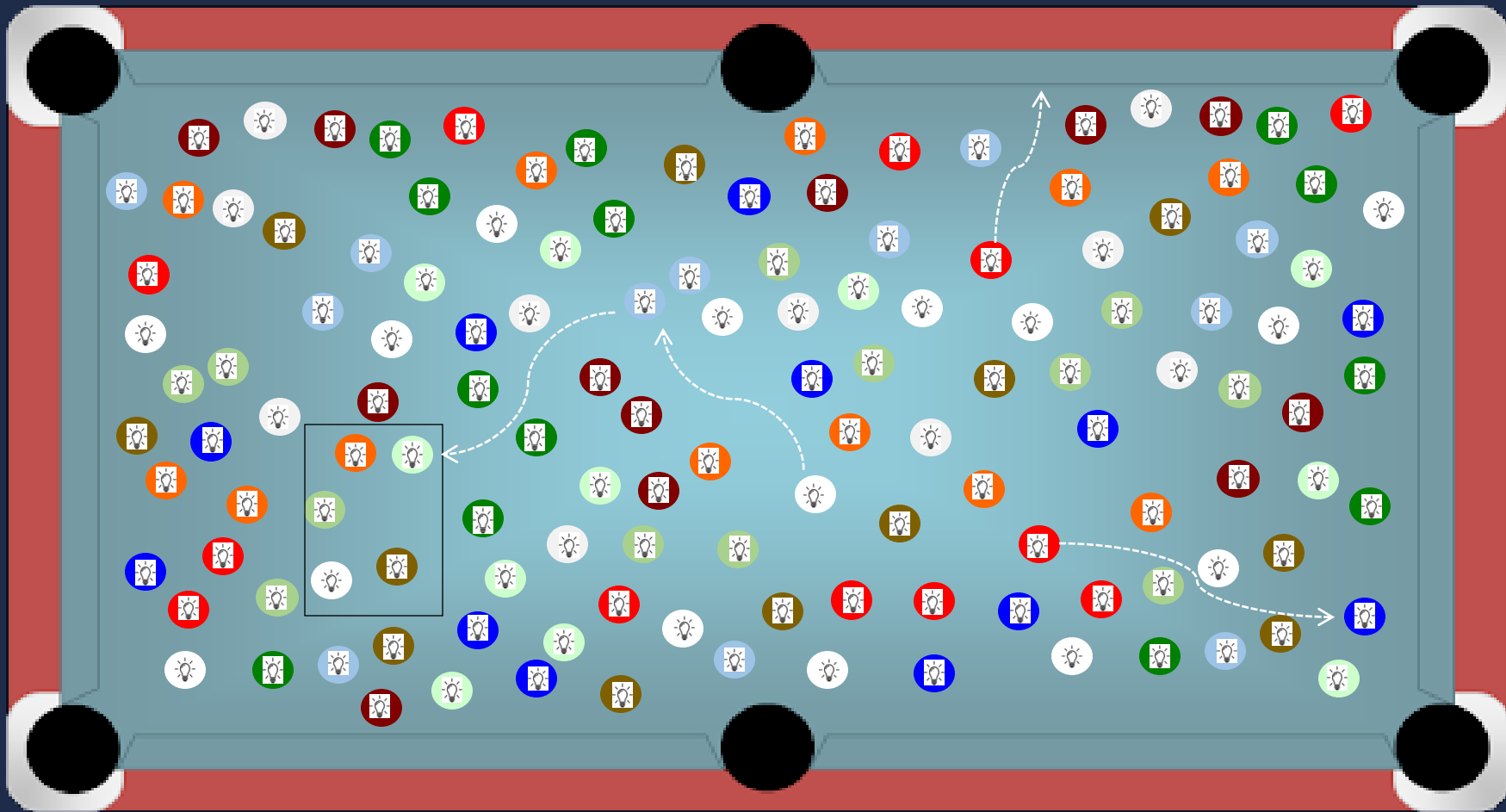
Problems of Disorganized Complexity



$$P(A) = n(A)/n(S)$$

And yet other systems self-organize with components that have agency

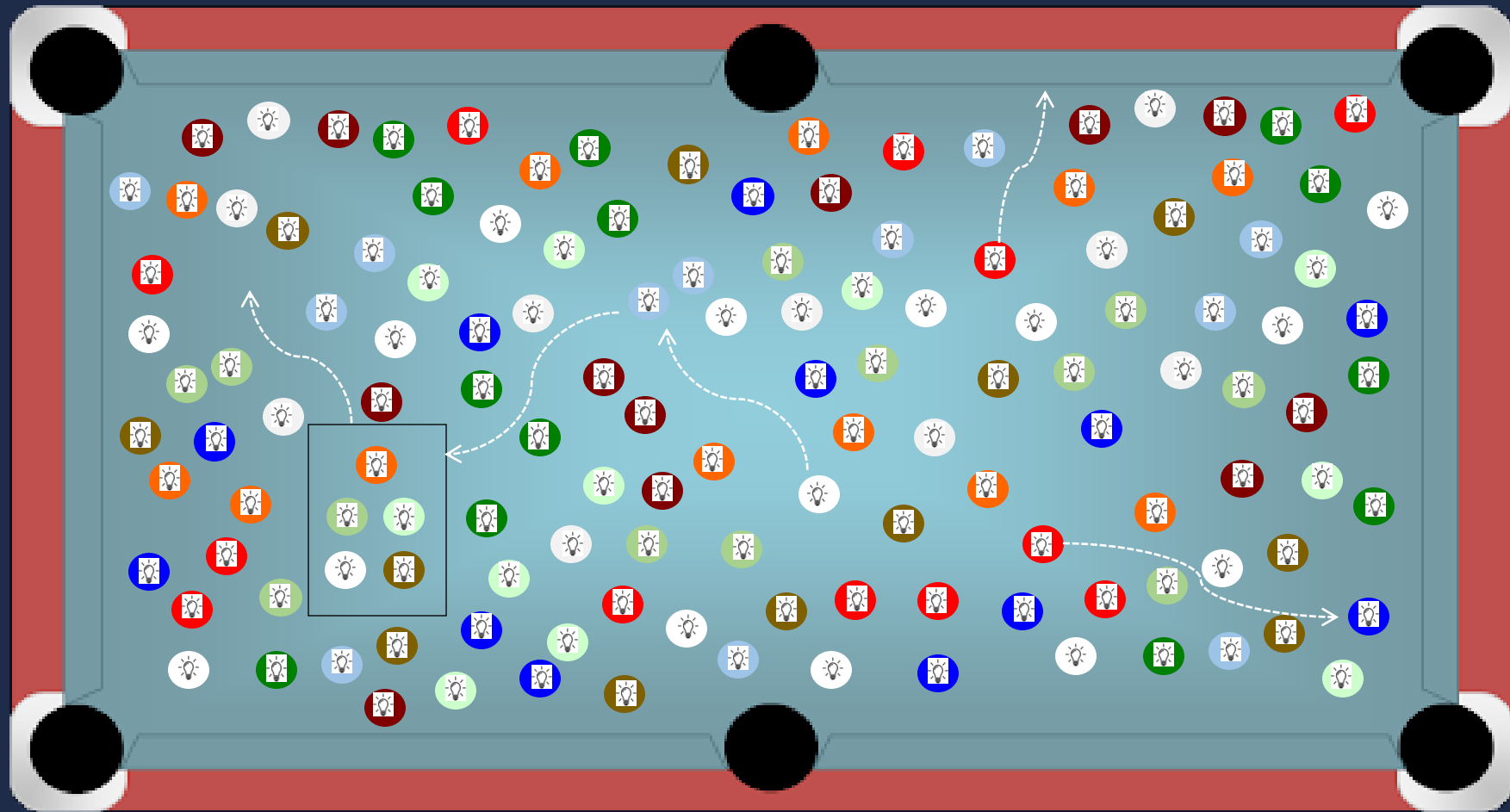
Problems of Organized Complexity



And yet other systems self-organize with components that have agency

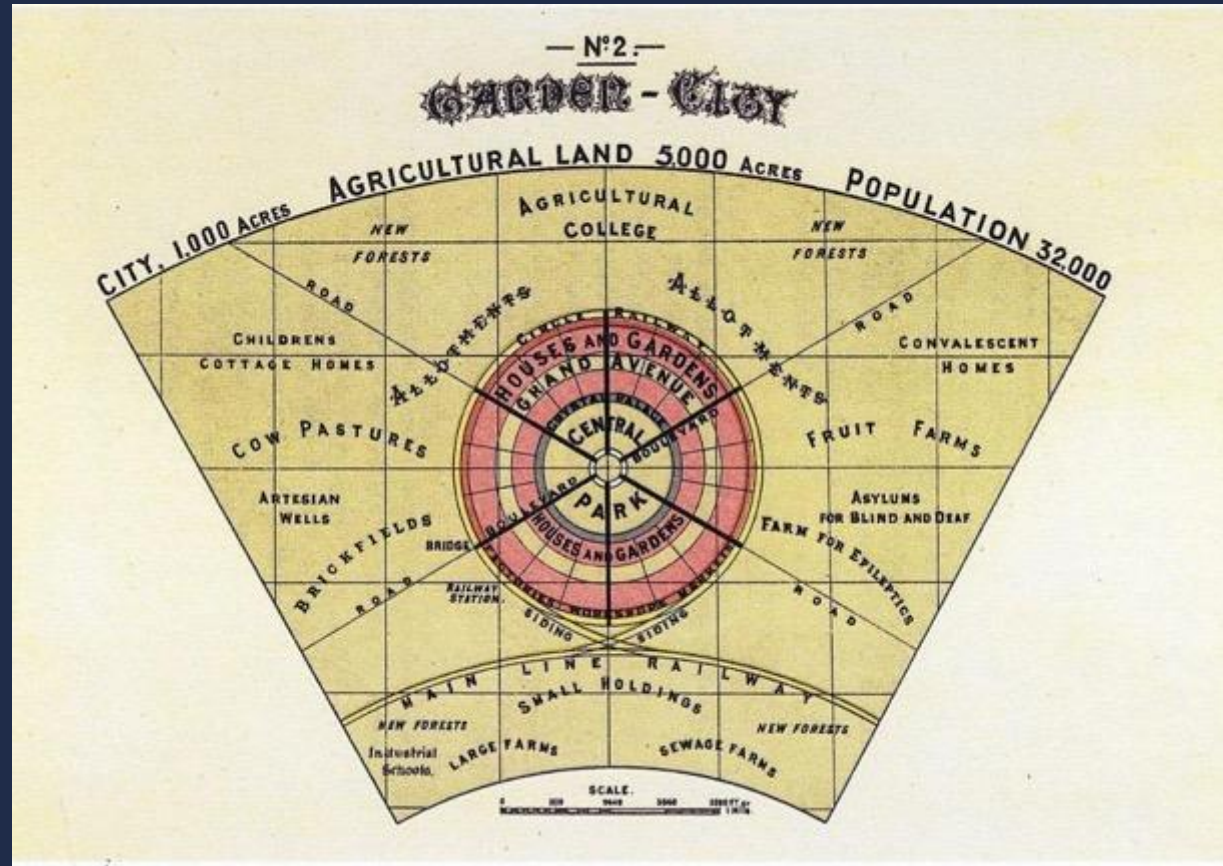
Problems of Organized Complexity

?



The “rational model” of urban design was applied under the assumption that cities are problems of simplicity

- In his book published in 1889 entitled *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, Howard treated the city as a problem of simplicity to be solved using algorithms derived from his idea of what an idealized set of living circumstances should be
- Argued that cities should house 32,000 people in standard-sized lots on one thousand acres geometrically organized to provide access to shared green spaces with an additional five thousand acres preserved for agricultural uses
- No consideration of individual preferences or diversities of lifestyles was incorporated. As Jacobs pointed out, “on this simple base of two-variable relationships [housing and jobs] was created an entire theory of cities



Le Corbusier treated cities as problems of disorganized complexity

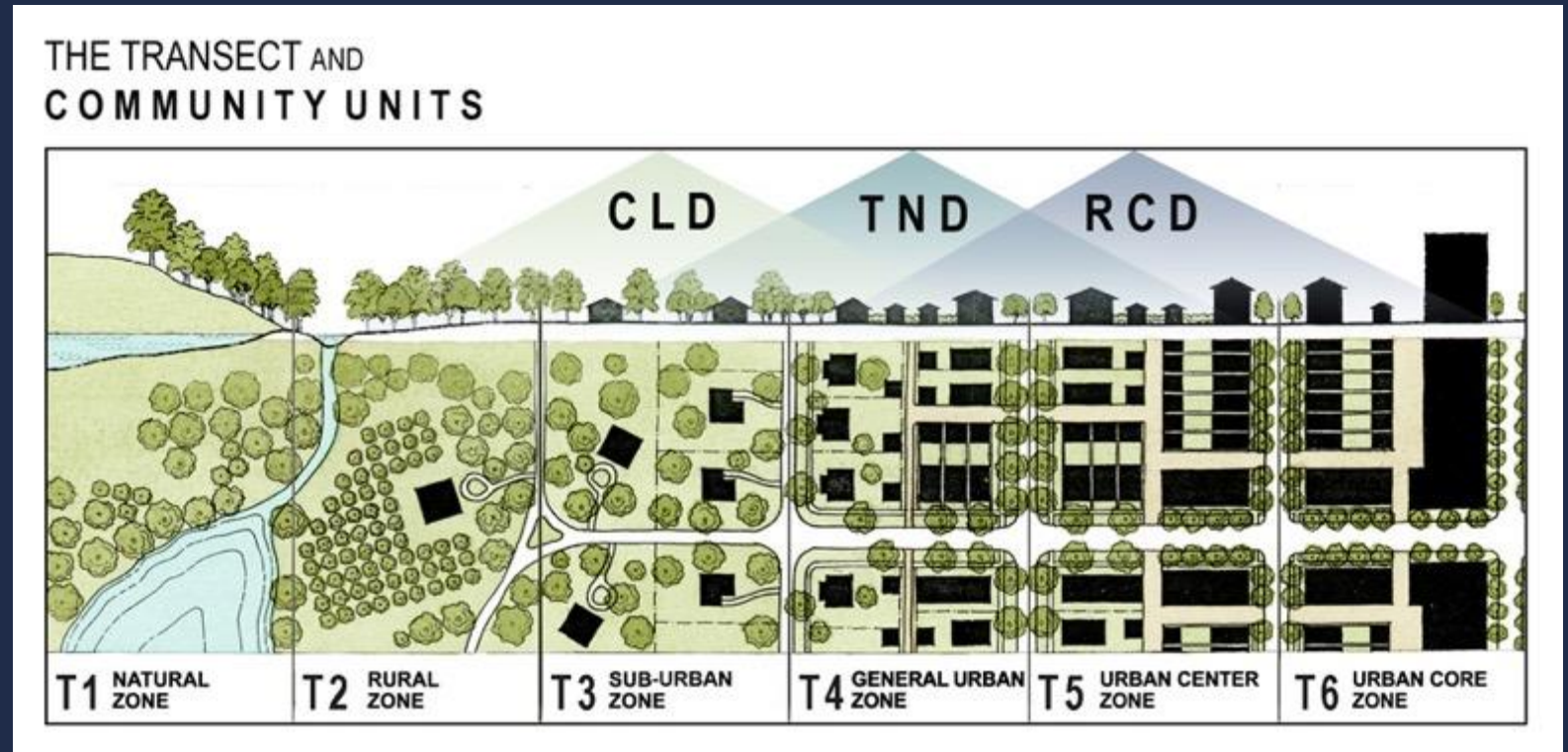
- When Le Corbusier looked at cities, he saw what he described as “**frightening chaos**.” He was convinced that cities lacked orderliness and that good architecture could impose it
- When Le Corbusier looked at Paris in the mid-1930s and saw streets teeming with people and vehicles, what he saw in his mind’s eye was a **volume of gas under pressure with molecules randomly bouncing off the walls and off each other**
- And just as the molecules of gas have no obvious direction or intention, Le Corbusier saw the people on the streets as similarly unruly. In his view, the obvious solution to such a circumstance is **to reduce the freedom of action of those elements by containing them through the use of restrictive, geometric barriers**.

Robert Taylor Homes



But if the problem is seen as one of organized complexity, and entirely different set of solutions arise

- Create the conditions necessary for outcomes to emerge independently
- Don't engineer cities, let them evolve organically based on individual choices
- Provide context and controls (this is not about anarchy!)



Defining the type of problem that crime represents leads to different types of solutions

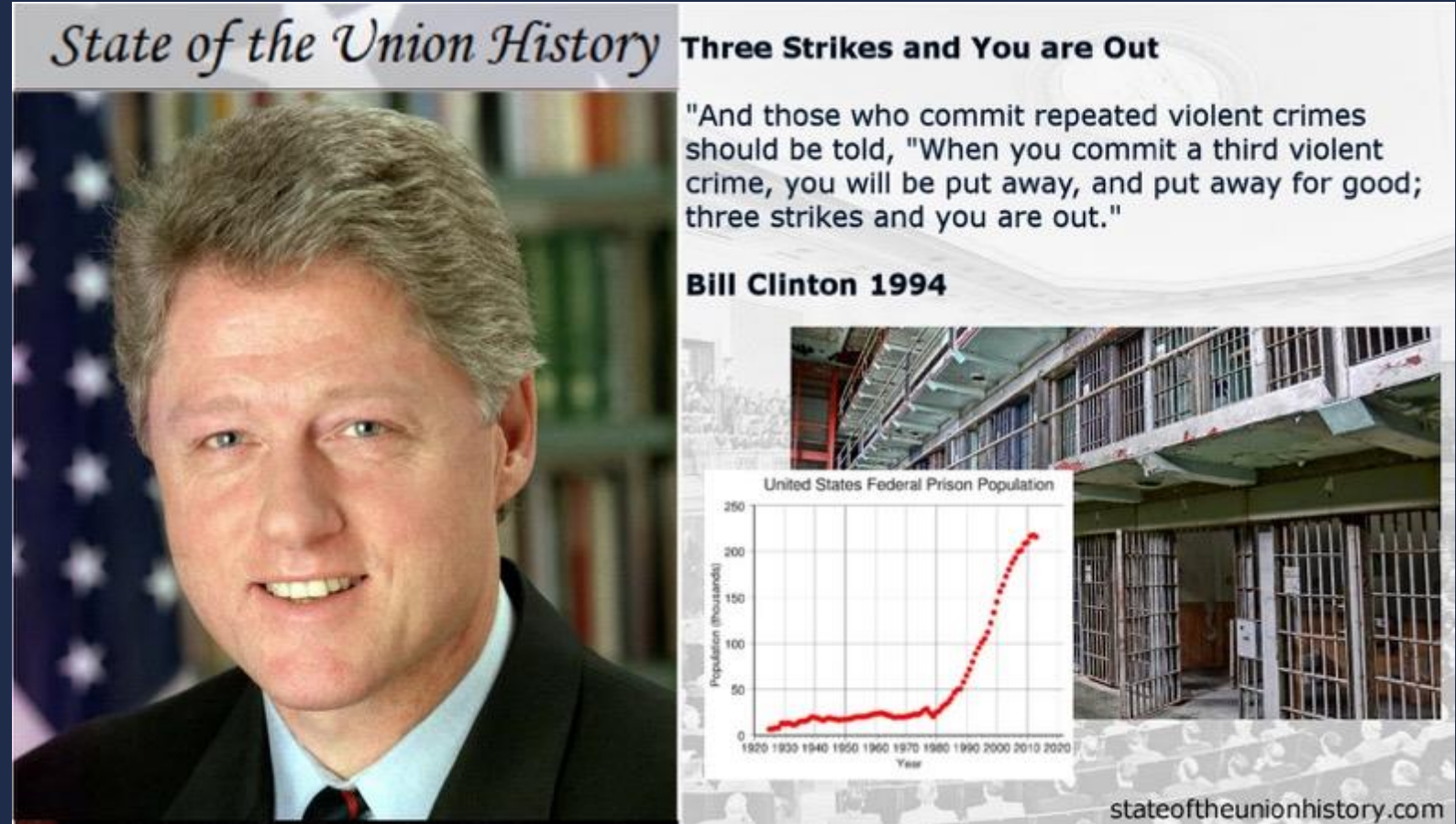
- Public safety **can be imposed** on a city through extreme security measures
- The idea is that **crime is the thing to be prevented** through private and public police actions
- **Treats the problem as a problem of simplicity**: erect a wall and the criminal cannot gain access

Homes in Johannesburg



“Three strikes and you are out” assumes that crime is a problem of disorganized complexity

- The **specifics of an individual's actions** are not important
- The future likely actions of an individual **cannot be predicted**
- Prisons represent a **“boundary condition”** to manage the overall population that is indifferent to the behavior of individuals



Jacobs was the first to characterize cities as problems of organized complexity



“On Hudson Street ... we are the lucky possessors of a city order that makes it relatively simple to keep the peace because there are plenty of eyes on the street. But there is nothing simple about that order itself, or the bewildering number of components that go into it. Most of those components are specialized in one way or another. They *unite in their joint effect* upon the sidewalk, which is not specialized in the least. That is its strength.”

Public safety is not imposed in a city, instead it *emerges from a set of conditions*

- Properly designed and activated streets discourage criminal behavior
 - Jacobs called this “*eyes on the street*”
- The adoption of complete street strategies are the direct result of this insight
- It is the non-linear – and therefore unpredictable – actions of individuals that generate public safety



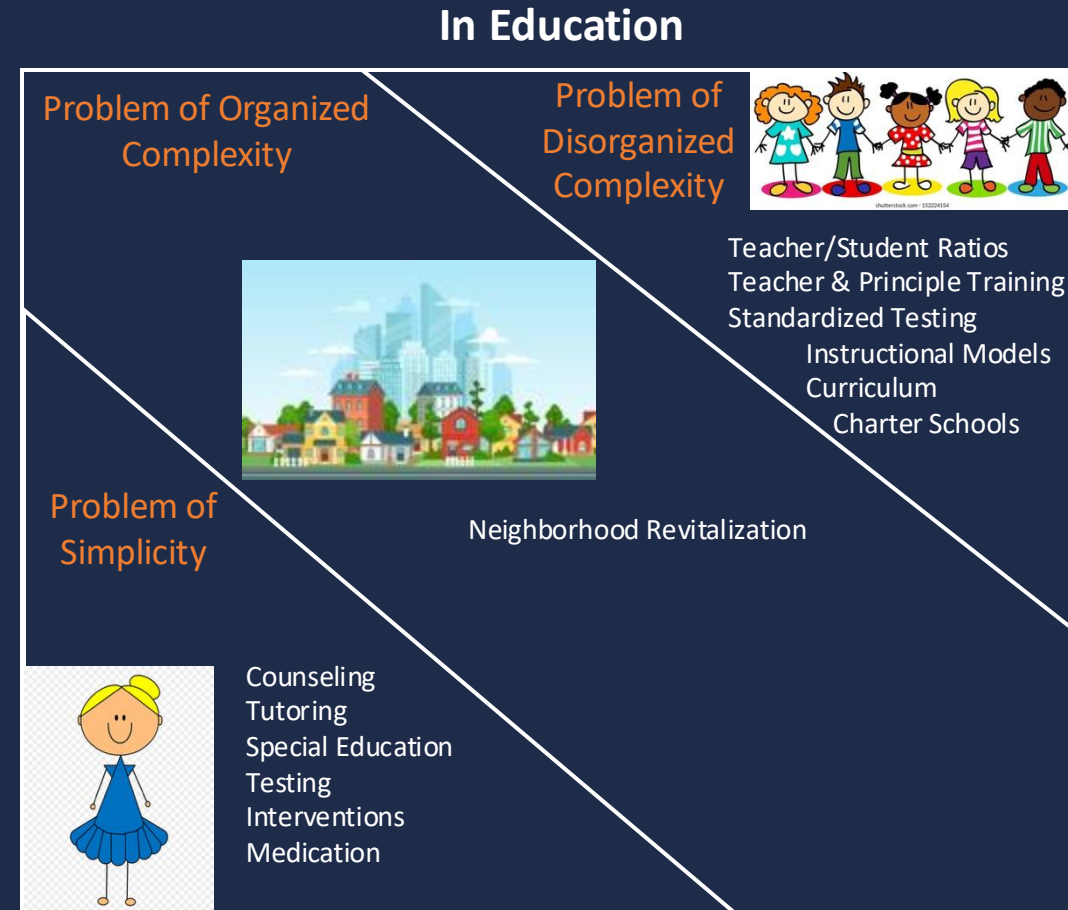
Jacobs spawned New Urbanism movement: creating the conditions needed to generate preferred outcomes

- Revolutionized how we **plan and design** cities
 - “eyes on the street”
 - “mixed uses”
 - “sidewalk ballet”
- Has had little if any impact on how we **manage** them
 - Two “non-overlapping magisteria”
- Jacobs 2.0 would extend her ideas to city management
 - The goal is to create the conditions out which the outcomes we care about in education, health, public safety and economic mobility would “**emerge independently**”



Were we to view the city as a problem of organized complexity, it would change most of what government does

- Government would be less interested in engineering preferred outcomes, and more **focused on creating the conditions** out which those outcomes emerge independently



This approach would also redefine what success looks like

- Efforts to disconnect and disaggregate our cities – incorporation and secession movements for example – **are a reflection of how we see how our outcomes are generated**
 - “If crime is high, we want to control our police departments”
 - “If schools are failing, we want to control our schools”
- It is based on a **deeply misguided understanding** of how these outcomes are generated
- And it only **makes matters worse for everyone**



What are the implications of this approach for framing policy issues in cities?

- For how policy issues are **defined**?
- For how they are **analyzed**?
- For how **government is organized** around problem-solving?
- For how the **public is educated** on the nature of the challenges our city's confront?
- For how we **should address the racial equity gaps** that continue to persist in our cities?

Honorable Doug Shipman, City Council President, City of Atlanta

- Doug Shipman elected president of the Atlanta City Council in November 2021
- Former CEO of the Woodruff Arts Center
- Founding CEO of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights.
- Shipman has served as a board member for several nonprofit organizations
 - Easter Seals of North Georgia
 - The Jimmy Carter Presidential Center
 - Midtown Alliance
 - Atlanta Metro Chamber of Commerce
 - Advisory Council of the Islamic Speakers Bureau
 - Honorary Board of the Anti-Defamation League (SE Chapter)



- Magna cum laude graduate from Emory University, Master of Theological Studies Degree from the Harvard Divinity School and a Master of Public Policy Degree from the Harvard Kennedy School