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Privatization Is Changing America's Relationship With Its Physical Stuff.

Turning more and more infrastructure projects over to outside companies makes citizens more like customers.

Last month, paddlers in New York state floated their kayaks and canoes in the Erie Canal to celebrate the waterway's 200th birthday. Workers first dug their shovels into the ground to start the construction of the ditch in 1817. Eight years later, over 300 miles opened for business, making it one of America's first big gifts to itself.

There was no apparent connection between the anniversary and the promotion, days earlier, by the White House of "Infrastructure Week," but the timing does invite some meditation. The spotlight event of the weeklong initiative took place on the banks of the Ohio River in Cincinnati, where President Trump gave a speech that left locals underwhelmed and infrastructure experts wondering if there really was a plan to rejuvenate America's sorely lagging works.

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