

Transformations of Urban America: Making the Unequal Metropolis, 1945 to Today

HIST 1153 / URBS 1153



**M / W 10:15-11:45 AM
College Hall 314**

Instructor:

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Grader:

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Office Hours: Th., 10:00-11:30 AM, College Hall 218, and by appointment

This course fulfills the College's Sector 1: Society

This sector focuses on the structure and norms of contemporary human society, including their psychological and cultural dimensions.

Courses in this sector use many analytical techniques that have been developed to study contemporary society, with its complex relations between individuals and larger forms of mass participation. Some Society courses are largely devoted to the analysis of aggregate forms of human behavior (encounters, markets, civil society, nations, supranational organizations, and so on), while others may focus on the relations between individuals and their various societies. While historical materials may be studied, the primary objective of Society courses is to enable students to develop concepts and principles, test theories, and perfect tools that can be used to interpret, explain and evaluate the behavior of human beings in contemporary societies. This objective will be realized through the specific content of the various courses, but the emphasis in each course should be on developing in students a general capacity for social analysis and understanding.

Overview

This lecture and project-based course is designed to introduce students to the historical development of modern American cities and their suburbs since World War II. Organized chronologically and thematically, the course is also intended to offer students an introduction to different ways of *knowing* and *experiencing* urban life through projects, readings, documentaries, and lectures organized around particular fields of inquiry on urbanity. These include sociology, ethnography, political science, and, of course, history. Assignments will include a short ethnographic research project, mapping projects, short written assignments, and historical and contemporary digital research projects on urban renewal sites in Philadelphia and possibly elsewhere. Course topics will include the histories of housing and gentrification; power, democracy, and urban citizenship; education; suburbanization; crime and policing; and the endurance and entrenchment of racial and spatial inequality in the context of the urban renaissance of the 21st century.

Course Details

This course is roughly divided between lectures (marked “L” on the syllabus) and what I call workshops (marked “WS” on the syllabus). The workshops will take a variety of forms: we will explore various digital-historical applications, databases, and mapping platforms; we will view and discuss various forms of media; we will read and discuss primary source documents; and we will work on projects in a collaborative and informal setting. On WS days, ***please bring your laptop or tablet, if you have one.***

There is no “textbook” for this course. Instead, my lectures, augmented by our readings (roughly 40-125 pages / week), are designed to provide the primary intellectual and historical framework. The mid-term assessment will draw not only upon our readings, but also upon lecture material: our key concepts, IDs, and “big questions,” which will be identified at the start of each lecture. Throughout the semester, students will have a variety of different ways to engage with and hone mastery of key concepts. These will include short written responses, longer form projects, and in-class discussion. In addition to gauging your facility with the material in real time, these exercises will prepare you for the format of the mid-term and

projects, which, in differing degrees, will ask you to consider the historical development of American cities write large and small.

Communication

I am available during office hours and by appointment. Email is the best way to get in touch with me. Please do not contact me via Canvas messenger; the interface is cumbersome and its alerts are spotty. I will make my best effort to respond to your emails in a timely fashion (i.e., within a few hours), but I may not reply as promptly to emails received after 5:00pm or on weekends (I have young children!). If your note is urgent, please indicate that in the subject line!

COVID and Attendance Policies

For the first month of the semester, I ask all students to wear masks unless speaking or sipping water or coffee, etc. My hope is that we can mitigate any potential COVID transmission in class during the critical opening weeks of the semester that would lead to unnecessary disruptions and potential harm. I will revisit this policy in early October.

I allow two (2) unexcused absences, no questions asked. That said, I encourage students to be in touch with me and / or Dominique (the keeper of our attendance) to let us know what's going on. These remain exceptional times, and there are many good reasons why you might need to miss a class: communication is essential! That is to say, even if you haven't used your two absences, communicate with us, and we can work out excused absences, too. After two unexcused absences, however, ***each subsequent unexcused absence will result in a one point reduction of your attendance and participation grade (15% of the overall course assessment).***

Mandatory Book to Purchase:

Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996 [2014]).

Using Canvas:

There are three main ways that we will use Canvas:

1. **Course Announcements** which will get pushed to your email and will be archived under the "Announcements" tab
2. **"FILES"**: this tab is where all readings (in the "readings" file) are posted other than those from Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis* or those linked and marked "Online" on our syllabus (in these cases, just click the link and read on your browser). All of

our assignment guides will also be posted here, too in the “Assignment Guides and Other Course Material” file.

3. **“ASSIGNMENTS” & “SYLLABUS”**: each of these tabs catalogues the various assignments and enables you to submit your work. Both includes all submission links for written assignments and projects, but the Syllabus tab also includes a linked and pasted version of this syllabus and all of our daily readings, etc., listed below. **Unless otherwise noted, all short responses and other assignments will be due by class time on the day listed and via Canvas.**

Using this syllabus:

A syllabus is both a statement of course goals and policies and a list of all assignments. Under each date below, you will find a set of readings, movies and documentaries to view, and other assignments, due dates, and materials, all of which are to be completed by the date of their assignment. **I strongly urge reading each day’s assignments *in the order they are listed*.** For example, on September 19th, the Hartman reading is very much a response – a clap back, even – to the DuBois piece, and reading them in order is essential to follow the arguments and debates between our texts, which play out not just on a given day but over the course of the semester. All readings other than the mandatory Sugrue book are available on Canvas or, as noted on the syllabus, **online** and thus linked.

Except where noted, all movies for this class will be available via the Penn Video Network under the [Academic Support Movies](#) tab. I will send an announcement with links ahead of each week with a movie or documentary to view. In some cases, I may be able to embed the link in this syllabus. N.b., the PVN is meant to be used on campus, though students have, in the past, been able to access movies off campus at times. I trust that you young people have many and sundry ways of finding and viewing content, but please be in touch if you’re having trouble accessing or finding a film.

A note on Technology in the Classroom

I strongly urge you to simply turn off your cell phone while in class. Not to vibrate. Not to silent. Just off. Do yourself the favor of focus. I reserve the right to embargo any devices that become a distraction during class.

I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand and on paper during lectures. As many recent reports from experts have found, using a computer, phone, or tablet for notes in class is not unlike smoking cigarettes: it not only limits your performance, but it also has deleterious second-hand effects on those around you. “Psychological studies have found that undergraduates who multitask on laptops comprehend less of what has been covered in a lecture than do other students. They have also examined students who were taking notes— with some students sitting next to those who were multitasking on their laptops. Those next to

a laptop multitasker also saw drops in what they picked up from the lecture.” —*Inside Higher Education*

It’s also important to remember that Penn is committed to equal access to education and if you have a compelling reason or a confirmed need, please feel free to use your laptop for notes. If you have a disability or need accommodation, i.e., a note taker, please consult the Office of Student Disabilities Services, and we can ensure that you receive the proper support and accommodation. Their website is: <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/>

On workshop days, however, if you have a laptop or tablet, please bring it to class. We will be engaging with a wide variety of online content and applications, and your ability to navigate this material solo or in partnership with another student is really important to the success of the workshops.

A note on Class Environment

I urge and invite diversity of opinion and strive to cultivate an environment in class and out in which students feel encouraged to freely express themselves. Higher education is meant to foster sustained, critical engagement with a broad range of material and perspectives but also, and most especially, to stimulate critical self-assessment and intellectual and personal growth. Civility, respect, tolerance, patience, and good humor are cornerstones of a thriving academic community and are essential to fostering meaningful personal introspection. These values are especially important as we wade into contentious issues of the last half century, many of which continue to define and divide the American body politic and many of which have their roots in urban space, urban politics, and urban inequality or perceptions about these spaces. This class is an opportunity to practice and model the best civil discourse that our broader national political conversation all too often lacks.

A note on Academic Honesty & Integrity

Students’ work must be completed in line with Penn’s Code of Academic Integrity, <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>

The library has pulled together a useful guide to avoiding plagiarism, here: <https://guides.library.upenn.edu/citationpractices/plagiarism>

I am always happy to discuss these matters in order to help you avoid costly mistakes. Violations – cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, facilitating others’ dishonesty, etc. – will almost certainly result in failing the course.

Outline of Assessments

West Philadelphia observation & SocialExplorer project	(15%)
3 (out of 5 possible) x 2pg Responses & Primary Source Analysis (graded satisfactory / unsatisfactory)	(10%)
Attendance & participation	(15%)
Midterm exam	(20%)
Urban Renewal Project	(40%)

Schedule of Assignments:

Wed., Aug. 31 Course Introduction

Mon., Sep. 5 NO CLASS / LABOR DAY

Unit 1: Approaches to the City

Wed., Sep. 7 **L: Penntification: West Philadelphia, University City, and the Making of the Modern Metropolis**

Margaret O'Mara, "Building 'Brainsville': The University of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia," *Cities of Knowledge*, 142-181

Davarian L. Baldwin, "When Universities Swallow Cities," *The Chronicle Review*, July 30, 2017

Annabelle Williams, "[Penn's Complicated Relationship with Gentrification in West Philadelphia](#)," *34th Street*, October 11, 2017 (read online)

Mon., Sep. 12 **WS: Discussion of reading like a historian, Jacobs, positionality and the normative "white gaze" & mapping; West Philly Projects Assigned**

*****2page response option on Jacobs due by class time via Canvas assignments tab**

Gideon Lewis-Kraus, "The Trials of Alice Goffman," *New York Times Magazine*, January 12, 2016

Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 5-96

In class: Rebecca Solnit, various maps

Wed., Sep. 14 **Maproom 1.0**

*****Meet in Van Pelt** (room TBA via Canvas announcement)

Mon., Sep. 19

L: Sociological and ethnographic approaches to urban life

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 1-9, 58-65, 97-111, 126-146, & 322-358

Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 3-10 and 81-120

Wed., Sep. 21

WS: Gentrification Discussion and introduction to Social Explorer

Before class, view: *Do The Right Thing* (1989) ([PVN LINK](#))

*****2 page, double spaced response option to *Do The Right Thing*** (must include substantive discussion of at least one reading from this week or earlier) via Canvas by class time

Lance Freeman, *There Goes the 'Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up*, ch. 3

Joe Coscarelli, "[Spike Lee's Amazing Rant Against Gentrification: 'We Been here!'](#)" *New York Magazine*, February 25, 2014 (**online via incognito window to avoid paywall**)

Brentin Mock, "[Spike Lee's Gentrification Problem](#)," *Pacific Standard*, December 5, 2017 (**online**)

Jared Brey, "[Study Suggests Gentrification Has an Upside. Housing Advocates Aren't Yet Convinced](#)," *NEXTCITY*, July 25, 2019 (**online**)

Mon., Sep. 26

Maproom 2.0

*****Meet in Van Pelt (room TBA)**

Jake Blumgart, "[West Philadelphia](#)," *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia* (**online**)

Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise*, ix-6 and chapter 6 ("The Black Male in Public"); **n.b.**, Anderson was on the faculty at Penn when he wrote this, and "Village-Northton" was his anonymized name for West Philly-U-City-Powelton, the subject of *Streetwise*

Wed., Sep. 28 Short Presentations of West Philly Projects

*****Projects submitted via Canvas prior to class**

Unit 2: Making the Unequal City

Mon., Oct. 3 L: The Politics of Redlining and Suburbanization

Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, Introduction, chs 1 & 2

Wed., Oct. 5 WS: HOLC Neighborhood Redlining (bring laptops to class
and I encourage you to preview our workshop material at
[Mapping Inequality](#))

View: [Crisis in Levittown](#) (online; ~30 minute version)

*****Two page response option on Vitcheck and / or *Crisis in Levittown*
& *NYTimes* piece**

Norris Vitcheck, "Confessions of a Block-Buster," *Saturday
Evening Post* (1962)

Kevin Kruse, "The Politics of Race and Public Space:
Desegregation, Privatization, and the Tax Revolt in Atlanta,"
Journal of Urban History (2005)

Debra Kamin, "A Professor Who Studies Housing
Discrimination Says It Happened to Him," *New York Times*,
August 18, 2022 ([online](#))

Mon., Oct. 10 L: Urban Renewal / Public Housing Crisis

Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, chs. 3 and 5 (chapter 4 is
not required but is recommended)

Destin Jenkins, *The Bonds of Inequality*, skim
introduction and read ch. 4, "Shelter"

Wed., Oct. 12

WS: Urban Renewal Discussion & Final Projects Assigned

*****View: *Pruitt Igoe Myth***

Rhonda L. Williams, "To Challenge the Status Quo by Any Means Necessary" in *The War on Poverty: A Grassroots History*

Andrew Sandoval-Strausz, *Barrio America*, ch. 4, "Building the Urban Crisis"

Mon., Oct. 17

L: Making Cities for Suburbs

Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, ch. 5, "Residence: Inequality in Mass Suburbia," and ch. 6, "Commerce: Reconfiguring Community Marketplaces"

Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, ch. 7

Wed., Oct. 19

L: The Urban Crisis

Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, chs. 8, 9 and conclusion

Mon., Oct. 24

Midterm Exam (in class)

Wed., Oct. 26

NO CLASS

*****FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE F. OCT 28**

Mon., Oct. 31

L: Benign Neglect? Cities in the 1970s

Kim Phillips-Fein, "The New York City Fiscal Crisis and the Idea of the State," in Sven Beckert and Christine Desan, eds., *American Capitalism: New Histories* (2018)

Timothy Lombardo, "He's One of Us," in *Blue Collar Conservatism* (ch. 5)

Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, ch. 5

Wed., Nov. 2

WS: “Underclass” Discussion and Project Workshop

This workshop will begin by discussing final project questions and frame the underclass questions before breaking discussing the question of welfare in American politics and the legacy of “the underclass debate”

*****2pg response option on “The Underclass” in light of Katz & Kohler-Hausmann by class time via Canvas**

“The Underclass,” Time, August 1977

Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, Getting Tough, chs. 3 & 4

Michael B. Katz, “Reframing the ‘Underclass’ Debate” (ok to skim!)

Mon., Nov. 7

L: Reagan’s Cities: Sprawl, Devolution, Privatization, and Silver Bullet Development in the 1980s

*****Urban Renewal Project Proposals due via Canvas assignments tab**

Mike Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles and the Militarization of Urban Space”

Bryant Simon, Boardwalk of Dreams, chs. 8 and 9

Unit 3: Power, Politics & Policing in the Unequal City

Wed., Nov. 9

L: The War on Crime & Criminalizing Communities of Color

Toussaint Losier, “The Public Does Not Believe the Police Can Police Themselves,” Journal of Urban History (2020)

Mason B. Williams, “How the Rockefeller Drug Laws Hit the Street,” Modern American History (2021)

Mon., Nov. 14 WS: Research Methods, StoryMaps, and Displacement Discussion

***** Bring laptops to class and be prepared to discuss project proposals**

Wed., Nov. 16 WS: Punitive Policing and Carceral Communities

***View: *Let it Fall*

*****2pg response option on urban policing in historical perspective (must integrate readings into discussion of the documentary). N.b., this is the final response option and you must have completed three of the five. If you've done three, you can skip this one!**

Joe Soss and Vesla Weaver, "Police Are Our Government: Politics, Political Science, and the Policing of Race-Class Subjugated Communities," *Annual Review of Political Science* (2017)

Mon., Nov. 21 L: Immigration, Queer Spaces, and Alternative Forms of Urban Power

Andrew K. Sandoval-Strausz, *Barrio America: How Latino Immigrants Saved the American City*, chs. 10 & 11

Tamar W. Carroll, "Turn Anger Fear, Grief into Action," in *Mobilizing New York: AIDS, Antipoverty, and Feminist Activism*

Wed., Nov. 23 NO CLASS / FRIDAY SCHEDULE

Mon., Nov. 28 L: Education, Resegregation, and Urban & Suburban Schools in the 21st Century

Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Segregation Now: Choosing a School for My Daughter in a Segregated City," *New York Times Magazine*, June 9, 2016

Wed., Nov. 30 WS: Final Project Workshop

****Sources and rough outlines due by class time via Canvas****

This workshop will be an opportunity for groups and individuals to get feedback on their projects outside of regular office hours

Mon., Dec. 5 L: Unequal Cities in the 21st Century

Patrick Sharkey, *Uneasy Peace* (selections)

Daniel Weeks, "[Why are the Poor and Minorities Less Likely to Vote?](#)" *The Atlantic*, January 10, 2014 (online)

Massarah Mikati, "Philly's Chinatown ready to fight Sixers arena proposal," *Inquirer*, August 12, 2022

Wed., Dec. 7 FINAL PRESENTATIONS (GROUP 1)

Mon., Dec. 12 FINAL PRESENTATIONS (GROUP 2)

Fri., Dec. 16, 11:59 PM FINAL INDIVIDUAL URBAN RENEWAL PROJECTS DUE VIA CANVAS (be sure to hit "publish" on your StoryMap to ensure that any final edits are included prior to submitting your link via the assignments tab)**