American Urban Sociology: From Hogtown to Smogtown

Explore a century of American hopes and fears about cities through the archetypes of Chicago and Los Angeles. Learn to see cities as built environments, ways of life, sources of community, and political economies. These paradigms ground our discussions of forces that shape cities and define American culture, including: race and residential segregation, technology, suburbanization, immigration, and gentrification. Central to this course are documentary films, field trips and curiosity about the cities you know.

This course satisfies requirements for CAST, Cultural Diversity, ENVS and LAWS.

Required texts

Contact info
greggor.mattson@oberlin.edu
Mailbox on my door, King 305c
Office hours: W 2-5pm; by appointment

Assessment
Participation 20% (attendance, homework, quizzes, discussion)
Assignments 50%
Tour writeup 10%
Final Portfolio 20%

Participation (in 6 easy steps)
• Read the texts before class and take notes on them
• Bring the texts and your notes to class
• Come to class on time every time
• Actively participate in discussions
• Open laptops only in the front rows
• Be respectful to others

Your on-time attendance is essential to your ability to participate. If you miss, get notes from a colleague and come to office hours with questions about the material you missed. Provide documentation at least two weeks before absences for approved College events.

Reading Tips
Read the lecture headings – they tell you the purpose of the reading. Skim each of the texts in 5 minutes. Notice section headings, bold words, or highlighted quotations to get the story the author is telling. When you read the whole thing, you’ll know where the argument is going.

Assignments
In the first week of class you will choose a U.S. city and begin collecting information and newspaper articles on it, comparing it to Chicago and Los Angeles and interpreting your city using texts from the class. You will turn in the memos twice: once as we go and, finally, and again with the maps and newspaper articles you’ve collected and assembled as a portfolio with your final paper summarizing what you’ve learned.

Lab Memo 1: Bodies in space DUE FEB 11
How is order structured in the space framed by Mudd? What would Jane Jacobs and William Whyte say about Mudd’s outside? Its insides?

Lab Memo 2: Crime hotspots DUE FEB 21
Use http://spotcrime.com to identify a crime hotspot in your city. Use the streetview function of Google Maps to apply St. Jean’s theory of collective efficacy by assessing whether the 4 ecological advantages to criminals are present. DUE MONDAY, FEB 22nd.

Lab Memo 3: Shape and ecology DUE MAR 5
In a page or two, answer the following: Does your city conform more closely to Burgess’ diagram or to Dear’s? In what ways? Why or why not? Create a google map of your city and identify the major lines of transportation, zones of heavy industry, dense urban settlement, and other ecological features that support your argument.

Lab Memo 4: Race and ethni-city DUE MARCH 22
Map ethnic areas and areas of racial segregation. Who lives in your city? What is the racial and ethnic makeup of your city? In a page or two, describe the similarities and differences between your city, Chicago and Los Angeles. Speculate on the reasons.

Lab Memo 5: Suburbs and sprawl DUE APR 18
In 2 pages, describe the relative density of your city and its surrounding communities. What do they say about its historical trajectory and long-term prospects for growth?

Lab Memo 6 Sprawl and the ethics of (re)development DUE MAY 7
Can there be ethical gentrification? Use the online archive of a major newspaper to learn the major issues your city confronts in urban development. In 3-4 pages, what advantages or disadvantages does your city have? What are the long-term prospects for growth?

* * * FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE THURSDAY MAY 16 by 10:45am * * *

Final Portfolio
Clean up your Google Map and assemble your memos into a portfolio that assesses your city’s place and trajectory in the American urban system.

Cleveland Tour
We will spend the day in Cleveland toward the end of the semester on a mutually agreed-upon Saturday. Once the day is set, it is a mandatory class meeting.

Late Assignments
Late assignments will lose one letter grade for each day late – this includes not turning in a hard copy at the beginning of class. Excused lateness must come from a Class Dean.
Honor Code: [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html)
Sign the honor code on each assignment—it is your reminder to know the boundaries of cheating (not doing your own work) plagiarism (taking credit for someone else’s work) and fabrication (making up sources, quotations or observations). Refer to the honor code and/or talk to me if you have concerns or are feeling so pressed that cheating seems attractive.

Disability Accommodations
If you are a student with a disability, make sure you’ve registered with the Office of Disability Services (Peters G-27/28 x55588) to develop a plan to meet your academic needs. Bring their recommendations to me at least two weeks before any due date or exam.

Grading rubric
Assignments will be graded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis sentence</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On time</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thesis sentence: 20 (UNDERLINED, answers how or why question appropriate to essay length. Yes, you get points for underlining it.)

Organization 20 (ideas grouped in paragraphs, evidence for main points)
Sources 30 (synthesizes a variety of texts, in-text citations in APA format)
On time 10 (printed copy hand-delivered by beginning of class, all or nothing)
Insight 10 (creativity, connections between texts, use of language, sparkle)
Conventions 10 (stapled, grammar, 1” margins, spelling, punctuated, 12-pt. font)

Sources & Citations (APA format)
You need not make a works cited for course readings but you must cite them properly in the text in APA format. *Wikipedia is not an academic source, but may lead you to primary sources.*

Paraphrasing primary sources (preferred):
Media in the 1950s catered to the rising middle class, giving a misleading impression of America’s families (Coontz 1990, p. 31).

Direct quotations (use sparingly) must be introduced:
Stephanie Coontz cites the enduring power of the media for creating a new American tradition during the baby boom: “The happy, homogenous families that we ‘remember’ from the 1950s were... a result of the media’s denial of diversity” (1990, p. 31).
UNIT 1: URBANISM AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPACE

Sociologists study the way people use space and turn it into places. We study how strangers interact with each other, the ways social order is promoted and maintained, and how crime flourishes. This unit introduces the empirical study of people in space and describes the sociological theory for the unique networking opportunities that cities offer.

Week 1: Feb 4-8

First Day: Course outline and guidelines

Urbanism as a way of life: making sense of a routine world of strangers

What are spatial and appearential ordering, and what do they make possible? What three distinguishing characteristics does Wirth identify as urban? Is Oberlin a city? Why or why not?

People in public: sidewalks and megastructures
LISTEN: “Hatfield 1980” by Everything But the Girl (first couple of minutes)

Architects and urban planners try to shape the experience of humans in space; sociologists study how people actually use the places in the built environment. Read these articles and then make a quick trip to Mudd Library. Walk around the building. I mean really walk around the whole building, inside and outside. How is order structured in and around Mudd?

HOMEWORK: How did these articles change the way you think about the building? What would Jane Jacobs and William Whyte say about Mudd’s outside? Its insides?

Week 2: Feb 11-15

MEMO 1 DUE

Theories of city life: subcultural urbanism
This article provides a succinct summary of a century’s worth of urban theory, so we will refer to it often. What does it mean to say that cities cause subcultural urbanism? What popular theories about cities does this approach overturn, and what are the implications for urban crime or intellectual life? Would Fischer agree or disagree with Josh Kron in The Atlantic?

**Putting Jacobs and Fischer to work: Crime**

**BOOK:** St. Jean, Peter K. B. Pockets of Crime. Foreword, Introduction and Overview, Appendix A.


St. Jean illustrates the insights gained by the union of a subcultural perspective with attention to the way people actually use places. What is the broken windows theory? What is collective efficacy? What four ecological advantages to crime to hotspots offer?

**Ecological advantages to crime**

BOOK “Explaining Crime Hotspots” and Chapter 6 “Robbery Hotspots” in St. Jean, Pockets of Crime

What is surprising about where robberies occur? Use CrimeSpots to begin research memo.

**Week 3: Feb 18-22**

**Neighborhood disorder: perceptions vs. reality**

BOOK “Perceived Sources of Neighborhood Disorder” and Chapter 7 “Battery Hotspots” in St. Jean, Pockets of Crime

How do batteries differ from robberies? What does this imply for broken windows theory and collective efficacy theory?

**What This All Means**

BOOK Chapter 8 in St. Jean, Pockets of Crime

---

**UNIT 2: HISTORY, TECHNOLOGY AND THE SHAPE OF THE CITY**

Where cities form, how their streets are laid out, their size and density and the distribution of workplaces and homes depend on the technologies of the day.

**Empires and Colonies**


Why were American Colonial cities so similar to each other? What is a primate city? How would the strangers you might have encountered been different between Philadelphia and London in the 18th century? How did the legal charters of American cities shape them differently than the charters of European cities? In what ways does Oberlin resemble those old Colonial cities?

EXTRA: What antebellum street fixtures are on College Street between Pleasant and King?
**Week 4: Feb 25-Mar 1**

**The Shape of Chicago, City of the American Century**


LISTEN: “[Come On Feel the Illinoise!” Sufjan Stevens. 2005. (read along with lyrics on google)

*Note the “target” diagram of Chicago invented by Ernest Burgess. In class we will watch Chicago: The First Hundred Years DVD 5973. In what ways did technology shape Chicago, and what factors helped Chicago attain Midwest primacy?*

EXTRA: Watch Chicago (2003) Miramax. Read Sister Carrie (1900) or The Devil in the White City (2003), Take ENGL 330 Modernist Chicago with Professor Johns

**The Shape of Los Angeles: Anti-city, Broadacre City, or just a grid?**


*Los Angeles has long puzzled urban theorists but is instantly recognizable to generations of media consumers from all over the world. One way to think about the diagrams (Burgess’ concentric zones vs. Dear’s keno capitalism) is that the newer one overlays the older one, at least in 19th century cities. How well do these two models of urban growth describe your city?*


**What is urban about Iowa? Or Oberlin? Or farms?**


*Replace “industrial” with “urban” in the first sentence to learn what farming has to do with a course on urbanism. In what ways are rural areas tied to urban ones?*

EXTRA: Watch King Corn (2007) DVD—5778 or Arid Lands DVD—6741
UNIT TWO: THE ETHNI-CITY AND RACIAL SEGREGATION: Space is actively organized to connect some and exclude others. American cities are racialized to the degree that “urban” can be synonymous with Black. In this unit we explore the creation of ghettos and ethnic enclaves, differences in their histories and effects, and their current-day prospects.

Week 5: Mar 4-8

“The problem of the 20th Century is the problem of the color-line” – W.E.B. Du Bois

This remarkable document of early 20th century race relations reveals how social meanings can be encoded in space, in terms of the built environment, practices and the meanings of places. What methods were used to enforce racial ideologies, and how were these encoded into places?

From “the Black city within the white” to ghettos of concentrated misery
LISTEN: Randy Newman’s “Rednecks.”

In what ways are laws and norms in conflict when it comes to enforcing racial segregation? What is the hyperghetto, and how is it related to the ghetto of the past. Why didn’t the repeal of racist land-use laws help the residents of Bronzetown?

Urban Ethnography: In Search of Respect
BOOK In Search of Respect “Introduction” and “Violating Apartheid in the United States”

The urban ethnography is a traditional form of scholarship about city life, revealing through “thick description” the ways that space, people and social forces collide to create meanings and power relations. How do Bourgois’ experiences illustrate the local contexts of law enforcement?

Week 6: Mar 11-15

In Search of Respect
BOOK “A Street History of El Barrio” + “Crackhouse Management: Addiction, Discipline, & Dignity”

A folk explanation might be that the land on which El Barrio arose is just cursed. What is the sociological explanation? In what ways is El Barrio connected to the rest of Manhattan...or not? How do neighborhood norms and a saavy understanding of criminal law govern the crackhouse?

In Search of Respect
BOOK “’Goin’ Legit’: Disrespect and Resistance at Work” + “School Days”

What is cultural capital? Why is Primo unable to convert his street savvy into legal enterprise?

EXTRA: Watch Do the Right Thing (1992) or *La Haine* / Hate (1995)
**In Search of Respect**

**Week 7: Mar 18-22**

**Ethnic enclaves vs. ghettos: the case of Chinatown**

*How are ethnic enclaves different from ghettos? In what ways does the melting-pot ideal fail to explain why new immigrants choose to live in Chinatown? What forces—normative, legal, social—conspired to shape immigrant enclaves in America?*

**The transnational community in the American City**

*Immigration is intrinsic to the history of American cities and a challenge to lay understandings of citizenship and belonging. Are the Mexicans in Smith’s study just in America or are they also of it? What does it mean to say a migrant is transnational? How is this related to globalization? How is it related to urbanism? How did legal changes in citizenship influence migrant practices on the ground?*

**Los Angeles and Immigration**

*The historical image of Chicago immigration is that of European immigration; the reality of Los Angeles immigration reveals the reality of the New Americans and how they are shaping our cities and American culture.*


**UNIT THREE: SUBURBS AND SPRAWL**
American suburbs are the flip side of the coin that are ghettos and barrios. This unit reviews the cultural beliefs and meanings that built white suburbs before turning to current issues in urban sprawl, the housing crisis, and the movement of immigrants and poverty beyond the city center.

**Week 8: Mar 23-31 *** SPRING BREAK ***

**Week 9: Apr 1-4**

**The shapes of suburbia**
BOOK: Hayden pp. xi-25, p 44¶2-3
How is it that America is such a suburban nation, and why are they so white? How is the legal and cultural architecture of American home preferences different from Europe?

**Streetcar suburbs**

BOOK: Hayden pp. 45-49; 61¶2-70; Chapter 5, entire

WATCH: Minelli and Garland, “The Trolley Song”

**Making white suburbs**

BOOK Chapter 6, entire

What is red-lining? HOLC? The FHA? In what ways did social meanings come to be encoded into the law and then into urban space? What residues of these policies remain today?


**Week 10: Apr 8-12**

**Boom! Economic-, Baby-, and suburban housing**

Chapter 7, entire

LISTEN: Malvina Reynold’s “Little Boxes” (1962)

What is Levittown and why is it (are they) important? What is the relationship between WWII and suburbia? Why is it not true that suburbs “just exploded over the landscape” by themselves? What parts of the suburban infrastructure were built publicly and which were built privately?


**Beyond bedroom communities: living and working in edge communities**

BOOK Chapter 8, entire


What is an edge node or edge city? What government infrastructure projects transformed rural crossroads into edge cities?

**Consumption: from downtown to malls to big boxes**

FILE Selections from Christensen, Julia. Big Box Reuse. The MIT Press, 2008.


What are the unintended consequences of land use rules in the U.S. when it comes to strip malls and convenience consumerism?

**Week 11: Apr 15-19**

**Exurbs and the real estate crisis**


You could read Chapter 9 of Hayden’s book, but I have selected a series of articles about the current housing crisis. You should still be able to answer the questions that Hayden poses: What are exurbs? Why are Whites but not Blacks worried about urban sprawl? What is the relationship between sprawl, persistent poverty, crime and growing inequality?

EXTRA: Hayden Chapter 9, “Rural Fringes.”

**Nostalgia and Futurism**
BOOK Chapter 10, entire “Nostalgia and Futurism” + 230-234.

**Jobs and Prospects for the Rust Belt**

UNIT FOUR: THE MIDDLE CLASS REDISCOVERS URBANISM: GENTRIFICATION
This unit answers the question “what is urban about urban outfitters” by examining the lifeways of today’s city dwellers and the roles they play in today’s service and culture-oriented economies. For whom is the city redeveloped? Who benefits and who loses? How do we know?

**Week 12: Apr 22-26**

**Introducing Neobohemia**
BOOK Lloyd, Chapters 1+2 “Introduction” + “Production and Neighborhood” + “Notes”

**Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City**
BOOK Lloyd, Chapters 3+4: “Bohemia” + “Grit as Glamour”

**Living the life**
BOOK Lloyd, Chapters 5+7: Living Like an Artist + “The Neighborhood in Cultural Production”
Week 13: Apr 29-May 3

The Bohemian Ethic and the Spirit of Flexibility
BOOK Lloyd, “The Digital Bohemia” + Conclusion
WEB Shukman, Henry. 2010. “Santa Fe, N.M., and How It Came to Be as It is.” NY Times, February 7.

There Goes The 'Hood
BOOK Freeman, “Introduction” + “There Goes the ‘Hood”
WATCH: SupremeUTV: “Real Talk Episode 5: Gentrification.”

Whose Gentrification?
BOOK Freeman “Making Sense of Gentrification”

Week 14: May 6-10

Implications
BOOK Freeman, “Neighborhood Effects in a Changing 'Hood” + “Implications for Planning & Policy”

How do we know what we know about gentrification?
BOOK Freeman, Conclusion

Neil Smith was perhaps the world’s leading theorist of gentrification. What do you make of his critique of Freeman’s book?

Seeing like a City

* * * FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE THURSDAY MAY 16 by 10:45am * * *