American Urban Sociology: From Hogtown to Smogtown  Greggor Mattson

SOCI 241 Syllabus  *  Spring 2009  King 341, MWF 3:30pm

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.

Required texts:

Contact info
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Mailbox on my door, King 305c
Office hours: Mon 2:00-3:00pm; Wed 9am-10:45am; by appointment

Assessment
Dedication to the readings
Participation  20% (attendance, office hours, questions, comments)
Low-stakes writing  20% (in-class writes, homework paragraphs, pop quizzes)
Portfolio memos  30%
Final paper + Portfolio  30%
Respect for each other

Participation (in 3 easy steps)
Participation begins with attendance but doesn’t stop there. Lectures are only a small part of this course. We will spend most of our time discussing the readings and linking them to the main concepts and themes of the course. Read the materials before class and bring them with you so we have a common vocabulary to discuss your personal reactions and experiences. My job is to guide discussions and make sure everyone’s questions get answered—though not necessarily by me. Come prepared to ask and answer questions. Here are some to start you off:

• what are the main concepts this author is using?
• what is the point of this article—what is the author trying to explain?
• how convincing is the argument?
• how does it relate to the others we have covered?

Bring reading notes to class with passages that you like, that capture a main idea, or puzzle you.
**Reading Tips**
It’s better to skim through each of the texts than to get hung up on a difficult page. Try skimming the whole selection in 5 minutes. Notice section headings, bold words, or highlighted quotations just to get a sense of the story the author is telling. When you sit down to read the whole thing, you’ll already know where the argument is going.

**Attendance**
Your on-time attendance is essential to your ability to participate. Besides, fun stuff happens at the start of class. If you miss, it is your responsibility to get notes from a colleague and come to office hours to discuss what you missed. Our time together is short—missing even one class may indirectly affect your grade if you miss assignment advice.

The first two absences are freebees; unexcused absences beyond two will affect your participation grade. Make up in-class work or quizzes during office hours at a penalty of one letter grade. If you will be missing class events for approved College events, please provide documentation at least two weeks before your absence so we can keep you up to speed.

**Portfolio**
In the first week of class you were choose a North American 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 in a three-ring binder with your final paper summarizing what you’ve learned.

**Memo 1: Shape and ecology DUE FEBRUARY 23**
On a map of your city, identify major lines of transportation and zones of heavy industry, dense urban settlement, and single family homes. In a paragraph or two, answer the following: Does your city conform more closely to Burgess’ diagram or to Dear’s? Speculate on why or why not?

**Memo 2: Residents DUE MARCH 20**
Who lives in your city? What is the racial and ethnic makeup of your city? How have they changed over time, and what challenges and advantages do they offer today? What is the segregation index for your city? In a paragraph or two, describe the similarities and differences between your city, Chicago and Los Angeles. Speculate on the reasons.

**Memo 3: Sprawl, growth & development**
Use the online archive of a major newspaper to learn the major issues your city confronts in terms of sprawl? What advantages or disadvantages does it have? What measures are in place to guide development? What are the long-term prospects for your city’s growth?

**Final Paper**
Using your portfolio, write a final paper of 8-10 pages summarizing your city’s place and trajectory in the American urban system.

**Honor Code:** [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html)
Remember to sign 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). All quotations should be attributed properly. 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>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis sentence</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
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<td>On time</td>
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<td>Insight</td>
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<td>Conventions</td>
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**Thesis sentence:** (UNDERLINED, answers how or why question appropriate to essay length. Yes, you get points for underlining it.)

**Organization:** (ideas grouped in paragraphs, evidence for main points)

**Sources:** (synthesizes a variety of texts, in-text citations in APA format)

**On time:** (printed copy hand-delivered by beginning of class, all or nothing)

**Insight:** (creativity, connections between texts, use of language, sparkle)

**Conventions:** (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).

Final Exam
I will distribute the final essay questions on the last day of class for you to study. I will choose three of them for you to answer during the exam period. They will be broad questions that will require you to draw on the breadth of the course and reflect on what you know about sociology.
UNIT 1: URBANISM AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPACE

Sociologists study the way people use space and turn it into places. They are concerned with how strangers interact with each other and the unique networking opportunities that cities offer. The unit introduces the empirical study of people in space and provides a brief history of how strangers have interacted in American cities from the 17th century to the turn of the 21st.

Feb 4: 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?

Feb 6: People in public: sidewalks and megastructures

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.

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

Feb 9: Theories of city life, especially subcultural urbanism
http://www.urbanarchipelago.com/

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? Would Fischer agree or disagree with the editors of The Stranger?

Feb 11: Putting Jacobs and Fischer to work
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 do crime hotspots reveal about the explanatory power of these theories?

Feb 13: Shapes of the City

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? In what ways does Oberlin resemble those American Colonial cities?

EXTRA: Take CLAS 203 The City in Antiquity with Prof. Wilburn.

Feb 16: The Shape of Chicago, City of the American Century
LISTEN: “Come On Feel the Illinoise!” Sufjan Stevens. 2005. (read along with lyrics on google)

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

Feb 18: The Shape of Los Angeles: Anti-city, Broadacre City, 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?


Feb 20: What is urban about Iowa? Or Oberlin? Or farms?
Van Biema Crookston, David. “A Rural Exodus from American Churches - TIME.”

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.

UNIT TWO: THE ETHNI-CITY: Space is organized, connecting and including some and excluding others. In the American context, this is racialized to a degree that “urban” is often synonymous with Black America. In this unit we explore the creation of ghettos and ethnic enclaves, differences in their histories and effects, and their current-day prospects.

* * * MEMO 1 DUE FEB 23 * * *

Feb 23: “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.

Feb 25: From “the Black city within the white” to ghettos of concentrated misery

EXTRAS: Watch Do the Right Thing (1992), take CAST 402 Barrios/Ghettos with Professor Perez

Feb 27: In Search of Respect
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 place, people and social forces collide to create meanings and power relations.

Mar 2: In Search of Respect
“A Street History of El Barrio”
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?

Mar 4: In Search of Respect
“Crackhouse Management: Addiction, Discipline, and Dignity”
Mar 6: In Search of Respect
“‘Goin’ Legit’: Disrespect and Resistance at Work”

Mar 9: In Search of Respect

FILM EVENING: March 10: *La Haine / Hate* (1995) DVD-5209 7pm King 239

Mar 11: Discussion: *La Haine / Hate*

Mar 13: 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?*

Mar 16: The transnational community in the American City

*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?*

Mar 18: Los Angeles and Immigration

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


*** PORTFOLIO MEMO TWO DUE MAR 20 ***

Mar 20: Metropolises in the rest of the world
These articles don’t really fit here. But I want you to have a sense of how developing countries’ cities grow, and this is where they fit into the syllabus. The principles of growth and sprawl for Shanghai and Mexico City will be important when we consider suburbs in the next unit.

SPRING BREAK

UNIT THREE: SUBURBS AND SPRAWL

The story of American suburbs is 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 and the movement of immigrants beyond the city center.

Mar 30: The shapes of suburbia

xi-25, p 44-2-3

Apr 1: Streetcar suburbs
45-49; 61-2-70; Chapter 5, entire
WATCH: Minelli and Garland, “The Trolley Song.”

Apr 3: Making white suburbs
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?


Apr 6: Boom! Economic, babies, 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?

EXTRA: Watch Revolutionary Road (2009),

Apr 8: Beyond bedroom communities: living and working in edge communities
Chapter 8, entire


What is an edge node or edge city? What government infrastructure projects transformed rural crossroads into edge cities?
Apr 10: Consumption: from downtown to malls to big boxes
Selections from Christensen, Julia. Big Box Reuse. The MIT Press, 2008.

Apr 13: 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.”

Apr 15: Nostalgia and Futurism
Chapter 10, entire “Nostalgia and Futurism” + 230-234.

Apr 17 GUEST SPEAKER
Readings TBA

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.

Apr 20: Introducing Neobohemia
Lloyd, Chapters 1+2 “Introduction” and “Production and Neighborhood”

* * * PORTFOLIO MEMO 3 DUE * * *

Apr 22: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City
Lloyd, Chapter 3: “Notes” + Bohemia

**Apr 24** Grit as Glamour  
Lloyd, Chapter 4

*** APR 25 METRO CLEVELAND URBAN TOUR ***

**Apr 27:** Living the life  
Chapters 5+6: Living Like an Artist + The Celebrity Neighborhood

**Apr 29** The Neighborhood in Cultural Production  
Lloyd, Chapter 7

**May 1** Making the Scene  
Lloyd, Chapter 8

**May 4:** Bohemian Capitalism  
Lloyd, Chapters 9+10:”The Digital Bohemia” + “The Bohemian Ethic and the Spirit of Flexibility”

**May 6:** Internet, technology and social connections  

**May 8:** Diversity, cities and modern life  

*** May 15: FINAL EXAM PERIOD 9:00am-11:00 ***