Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Metropolitan Studies: the urban experience in historical and contemporary perspective

V55.063001 (Morse Academic Plan / MAP)
Spring 2003, New York University
Tuesday/Thursday 2:00-3:15pm (plus recitation sections)
Location: Silver, 809

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m (sign-up sheet posted on office door)
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"The city is the high point of human achievement, objectifying the most sophisticated knowledge in a physical landscape of extraordinary complexity, power and splendor at the same time as it brings together social forces capable of the most amazing sociotechnical and political innovation. But it is also the site of squalid human failure, the lightning rod of the profoundest human discontents, and the arena of social and political conflict. It is a place of mystery, the site of the unexpected, full of agitations and ferment, of multiple liberties, opportunities, and alienations; of passions and repressions; of cosmopolitanism and extreme parochialisms; of violence, innovation and reaction. The capitalist city is the arena of the most intense social and political confusions at the same time as it is a monumental testimony to and a moving force within the dialectics of capitalism's uneven development [...] How to penetrate the mystery, unravel the confusion, and grasp the contradictions?"
--David Harvey,
The Urban Experience (1989)

This course provides a broad, multidisciplinary introduction to the field of urban studies. The modern capitalist city is by its very nature a complex, multifaceted and politically contested social space. To examine the multiple contours and contradictions of modern urban life we shall read works by a wide range of writers, including sociologists, geographers, historians, anthropologists, political scientists, economists, planners and architects. First, we survey various methodological approaches that have been deployed within the social sciences to investigate the urban experience, and we relate these approaches to the development of modern capitalist urban society. We then explore the historical geography of capitalist urbanization since the first industrial revolution of the mid-19th century and its associated sociopolitical tensions. After examining political responses to the industrial city, we investigate the dynamics of capitalist urbanization during the early and mid-20th century. The final part of the course surveys various aspects of urban restructuring/urban social life in North America during the post-1970s period. Among the major topics covered in this part of the course are: suburbanization and the reshaping
of urban form; urban economic restructuring; globalization; gentrification; urban governance; 
and racism and ‘ghettoization’. The course concludes by examining two major urban crises of the 
last decade in the USA—the Los Angeles uprising of 1992; and the response to the attack on the 
World Trade Center in New York City.

COURSE READINGS

Required books: available for purchase at NYU Bookstore.


Required course packet: a course packet is available for purchase at New University Copy (11 
Waverly Place, between Mercer and Green streets, Tel. 212 473 7369). This packet contains 
required readings that are not included in the books listed above. (Note: the readings for Topic 
12 are not included in the reader; they will be made available for purchase from New University 
Copy after Spring Break).

Readings on reserve. Where possible, photocopies of the required books, articles and book 
chapters have also been placed on reserve in Bobst Library (A Level). Please note: if you choose 
to rely on the library reserve for access to the course readings, you are expected to photocopy 
these materials for yourself rather than reading the reserve copies. This will facilitate other 
students’ access to the reserve materials. Please be considerate: all reserve materials should be 
returned to the reserve desk as soon as you have finished photocopying them.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course covers an extremely wide range of topics and a broad historical period. In general, I 
have assigned between 100 and 120 pages of reading material for each week—but this will vary 
somewhat depending on the difficulty of the reading. The assigned texts are often complex and 
will require more than one reading. In order to do well in the course, therefore, it is essential 
that you (a) attend all lectures and recitations, and (b) prepare for each of these meetings by 
doing the readings thoroughly and on time. The lectures will clarify the major ideas and 
concepts contained in the readings and will also present important additional material on each week's topic. Attendance at weekly recitation sections is essential to your progress in the course. 
These meetings are intended to serve as a forum in which to discuss and debate the issues 
raised in the weekly readings and in each week's lectures. They will also provide you with an 
opportunity to ask for further clarification regarding any issues in the lectures or readings that 
you are uncertain about.

Your final grade will result from four components:

(1) Regular and timely attendance at all lectures and recitation sections + class 
participation (25% of final grade). Attendance will be taken frequently at lectures and 
routinely at recitation sections. Unexcused absences at more than 3 lectures or recitation 
sections will result in a grade of "F" for this course.
(2) Weekly 1-page ‘reaction papers’ on assigned readings (25% of final grade). These brief papers will be handed in to your T.A. at the beginning of the Thursday lecture each week, except during weeks in which longer papers are due. No late papers will be accepted.

(3) Three short (7 page) papers during the course of the semester (25% of final grade). Topics will be distributed in class. No later papers will be accepted.

(4) Final exam on all topics covered in the course (25% of final grade).

Note on late work: Late work will not be accepted without a valid excuse. Except in truly extenuating circumstances, requests for extensions must be submitted (both to the instructor and your TA) before the deadline in question. Appropriate documents (e.g., doctor’s notes, etc.) should be provided.

Note on plagiarism: According to the NYU/MAP Statement on Academic Integrity, “Plagiarism consists in presenting ideas and words without acknowledging their source and is an offense against academic integrity.” Any student who plagiarizes the work of others will be given a grade of “F” for the course. For further details on what constitutes plagiarism, see the NYU/MAP Statement on Academic Integrity (to be distributed at our first class meeting).

CLASS ANNOUNCEMENT EMAIL LISTSERVER
I have set up a listserver for distributing announcements and exam questions to the entire class. All students should sign up for this listserver in order to receive announcements and other course materials. To do so, please follow these instructions:

SUBSCRIBING:

Send a blank message to: join-met-studies@forums.nyu.edu

UNSUBSCRIBING:

Send a blank message to the list's unsubscribe address:

leave-met-studies@forums.nyu.edu
SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS

Introduction to the course: the urban condition in the contemporary USA 1/21 and 1/23

Readings:


Note: these three essays are to be discussed in recitation sections at the end of this week or early next week. Your first reaction paper is due at this Thursday’s lecture, 1/23.

Lecture 1/21 Introduction to the course

Lecture 1/23 The city and the social sciences: an introduction to urban social analysis

Topic 1 Contours of the 'urban question': three initial theoretical perspectives 1/28, 1/30 and 2/4

Readings:


Lecture 1/28 Georg Simmel: experiencing the modern metropolis

Lecture 1/30 Louis Wirth: a sociological definition of urbanism

Lecture 2/4 David Harvey: the urban process and ‘creative destruction’ under capitalism
Topic 2
Mapping urban space:
investigating the geographies of social power in the city
2/6, 2/11 and 2/13

Readings:


Lecture 2/6
Introduction to urban sociospatial analysis: geographies of social power
Ernest Burgess: social Darwinism and the ‘dartboard’ model of urban space

Lecture 2/11
Ernest Burgess, continued: the limits of the Chicago School?
Friedrich Engels: class domination and urban sociospatial organization

Lecture and discussion 2/13
Mike Davis and Elizabeth Wilson: geographies of fear and sexuality in the city

Topic 3
Capitalism and the historical geographies of urbanization
2/18 and 2/20

Readings:


Lecture 2/18
What is capitalism?
Capital accumulation, creative destruction and the dynamics of urbanization
Introduction to David Gordon’s work
Lecture 2/20  Capital, labor and the historical evolution of urban form in the USA  
The limits to Gordon’s analysis: how much does class struggle explain?

Topics for Paper #1 to be distributed on 2/20.  
Papers are due at the beginning of class on 2/27.

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<th>Topic 4</th>
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<td>Class, gender and the social geographies of the industrial city</td>
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Readings:


Lecture 2/25  Class, gender and the geographies of the industrial city

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<th>Topic 5</th>
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<td>The modernist city and urban planning: from urban renewal to urban removal</td>
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<td>2/27, 3/4 and 3/6</td>
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Readings:


• Recommended: Peter Hall, "The city of towers," in Cities of Tomorrow, 218-261.

Lecture 2/27 Modernism as creative destruction: Le Corbusier and Robert Moses compared

Lecture 3/4 'A shout in the street': Jane Jacobs and the critique of modernism

Film and discussion 3/6
"The World that Moses Built" (PBS/Obenhaus films, 1988)

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**Topic 6**
The city exploded: postwar transformations of urban and regional space
3/11 and 3/13

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Readings:


Also recommended:

• Peter Hall, "The city of by-pass variegated" and "The city on the highway," in Cities of Tomorrow, 48-86, 294-351.

Lecture 3/11 Dynamics of suburbanization:
comparing the cases of France, Britain and the USA

Lecture 3/13 Towards polycentric urban regions: reworking the urban fabric

--- No classes during the week of March 10—Spring Break ---
Topic 7
Cities in crisis: economic restructuring and uneven development
3/25

Readings:


Lecture 3/25 Economic restructuring and uneven development in comparative perspective: the cases of Detroit, Houston and Los Angeles

Topics for Paper #2 to be distributed on 3/25
Papers are due in class on 4/1

Topic 8
The political economy of urban development:
the city as a growth machine
3/27

Readings:


Lecture 3/27 The city as a growth machine
**Topic 9**  
Cities and globalization  
4/1 and 4/3

**Readings:**


**Lecture 4/1**  
Mapping the world urban system

**Lecture 4/3**  
Global city formation, labor market change and sociospatial polarization

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**Topic 10**  
Gentrification and the ‘new urban frontier’  
4/8, 4/10 and 4/15

**Readings:**


**Lecture 4/8**  
What is gentrification? Causes and consequences

**Lecture 4/10**  
Gentrification and the dynamics of urban restructuring

**Film 4/15**  
Topic 11
Racism and ‘ghettoization’ in the USA: origins and consequences
4/17 and 4/22

Readings:


- Peter Hall, “The city of the permanent underclass,” in Cities of Tomorrow, 427-468.


Note: the version of this chapter that is included in Bridge/Watson volume is abridged and is missing some key arguments; you should read the full version included in the course packet.

- Loïc J. D. Wacquant, ”The ghetto, the state and the new capitalist economy,” in Philip Kasinitz ed., Metropolis, 418-449.

Lecture 4/17  Racial segregation in US cities: origins, causes and consequences
Making sense of the ‘communal ghetto’

Lecture 4/22  The transition to ‘hyperghettoization’
Policy debates on the ‘underclass’

Film
"Hatred" (La haine, Paris 1995); viewing times to be arranged outside of class in the Avery Fischer media center of Bobst Library.

Topic 12
Two cases of urban crisis and political response:
the Los Angeles urban uprising (1992) and the aftermath of 9/11 (2001)

4/24, 4/29 and 5/1

Note: the readings for this topic are not included in the course packet; they will be made available for separate purchase from New University Copy; they will also be placed on reserve in Bobst Library.

Readings on the LA uprising:


**Lecture 4/24** The LA urban uprising

**Film 2/29** “L.A. is burning”. Produced and directed by Elena Mannes, Frontline (1993).

**Readings on the aftermath of 9/11 and urban reconstruction in New York City:**


• Peter Marcuse, “The architectural competition for the World Trade Center site,” Email posting to the RC21 listserv, 21 December 2002.


**Lecture 5/1** Remaking New York City after 9/11

**Topics for Paper #3 to be distributed on 4/29.**

**Papers are due in your TA’s mailboxes by 5/6.**