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

V55.0631-001 (Morse Academic Plan / MAP)  
Spring 2004, New York University  
Tuesday/Thursday 11:00am – 12:15pm (plus recitation sections)  
Location: Silver, 713

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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.


**E-journals:** some of the readings can be downloaded directly from the Bobst Library website. These readings will not be put on reserve in the library or included in the course packet. *These readings are simply marked "E-journal" on the syllabus. You are expected to download them and print them out on your own.* Bobst E-journals can be found via the Bobst Library webpage: http://library.nyu.edu/collections/find_ejournals.html

**Required course packet:** a course packet containing additional required reading materials is available for purchase at New University Copy (11 Waverly Place, between Mercer and Green streets, Tel. 212 473 7369). This packet contains readings that are not available as E-journals and are not included in the books listed above. (Note: the readings for the final week of the semester will be made available for purchase from New University Copy after Spring Break).

**Readings on reserve.** Course books and course packet readings 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 mandatory and 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.
**Important note on attendance:** any student who misses more than 3 recitation sessions without a valid excuse will automatically fail this course. Your TA will be taking attendance on a weekly basis and will also be monitoring your attendance in lectures.

**On lateness:** do not come to section or class late. This is distracting to everyone.

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).

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. Further instructions to be provided in class. **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 automatically fail the course. For further details on what constitutes plagiarism, see the NYU/Map Statement on Academic Integrity (attached to the back of the syllabus).

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**CLASS ANNOUNCEMENT EMAIL LISTSERVER**

I will be setting 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. Details to be announced.
SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS

Introduction to the course: the urban condition in the contemporary USA
1/20 and 1/22

Readings:


Note: these three essays are to be discussed in the Friday and Monday recitation sections. Your first reaction paper is due at this Thursday's lecture, 1/22.

Lecture 1/20 Introduction to the course

Lecture 1/22 The city and the social sciences: an introduction to urban social analysis

Topic 1
Contours of the 'urban question': three initial theoretical perspectives
1/27, 1/29 and 2/3

Readings:


Lecture 1/27 Georg Simmel: experiencing the modern metropolis

Lecture 1/29 Louis Wirth: a sociological definition of urbanism

Lecture 2/3 David Harvey: the urban process and 'creative destruction' under capitalism
**Topic 2**  
Mapping urban space:  
investigating the geographies of social power in the city  
2/5, 2/10 and 2/12

**Readings:**


**Lecture 2/5**  
Introduction to urban sociospatial analysis: geographies of social power  
Ernest Burgess: social Darwinism and the 'dartboard' model of urban space

**Lecture 2/10**  
Ernest Burgess, continued: the limits of the Chicago School?  
Friedrich Engels: class domination and urban sociospatial organization

**Lecture and discussion 2/12**  
Mike Davis and Elizabeth Wilson: geographies of fear and sexuality in the city

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**Topic 3**  
Capitalism and the historical geographies of urbanization  
2/17 and 2/19

**Readings:**


**Lecture 2/17**  
What is capitalism?  
Capital accumulation, creative destruction and the dynamics of urbanization  
Introduction to David Gordon's work
Lecture 2/19 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 2/19.
Papers are due at the beginning of class on 2/26.

Topic 4
Class, gender and the social geographies of the industrial city
2/24

Readings:

Lecture 2/24 Class, gender and the geographies of the industrial city

Topic 5
The modernist city and urban planning: from urban renewal to urban removal
2/26, 3/2 and 3/4

Readings:

Lecture 2/26 Modernism as creative destruction: Le Corbusier and Robert Moses compared

Lecture 3/2 'A shout in the street': Jane Jacobs and the critique of modernism

Film and discussion 3/4
"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
3/9 and 3/11

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 3/9 Dynamics of suburbanization:
comparing the cases of France, Britain and the USA

Lecture 3/11 Towards polycentric urban regions: reworking the urban fabric

© -- No classes during the week of March 15—Spring Break -- ©
Topic 7  
Cities in crisis: economic restructuring and uneven development  
3/23

Readings:


Lecture 3/23  Economic restructuring and uneven development in comparative perspective: the cases of Detroit, Houston and Los Angeles

Topics for Paper #2 to be distributed on 3/23  
Papers are due in class on 3/30

Topic 8  
The political economy of urban development: the city as a growth machine  
3/25

Readings:


Lecture 3/25  The city as a growth machine

Topic 9  
Cities and globalization  
3/30 and 4/1

Readings:

Lecture 3/30 Mapping the world urban system

Lecture 4/1 Global city formation, labor market change and socio-spatial polarization

Topic 10
Gentrification and the 'new urban frontier'
4/6, 4/8 and 4/13

Readings:


Lecture 4/6 What is gentrification? Causes and consequences

Lecture 4/8 Gentrification and the dynamics of urban restructuring


Topic 11
Racism and 'ghettoization' in the USA: origins and consequences
4/15 and 4/20

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 4/15  Racial segregation in US cities: origins, causes and consequences
Making sense of the ‘communal ghetto’

Lecture 4/20  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)

4/22, 4/27 and 4/29

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.

Readings on the LA uprising:

• Melvin Oliver, James Johson Jr. and Walter Farrel Jr. “Anatomy of a rebellion: a political-
  economic analysis,” in Robert Gooding-Williams ed., Reading Rodney King: Reading Urban

• Interview with Mike Davis, “Uprising and repression in LA,” in Robert Gooding-Williams ed.,

• William Fulton, “Whose riot was this, anyway?” from The Reluctant Metropolis: the Politics of

Lecture 4/22  The LA urban uprising

Film 2/27  “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:

• Re-read Peter Marcuse, “Urban form and globalization after September 11: the view from
  New York,” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 26, 3, 2002, 596-606 (E-
  journal).

• Robert Warren, “Situating the city and September 11th: military urban doctrine, ‘pop-up’
  armies and spatial chess,” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 26, 3,

Lecture 4/29  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.