

**The Contemporary American City**  
Social Studies 98kc

Syllabus 1.4  
[September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008]

Fall 2008  
Place: Sever Hall 105  
Time: Wednesdays, 2-4 PM

Instructor:  
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in Social Studies

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**Course Catalog Description:** *Explores the political, economic, and social challenges facing US cities since roughly 1965. Major topics include deindustrialization and economic transformation, relations between racial and ethnic groups, suburbanization, the changing design and role of cities, and the impact of globalization on US cities. Special attention to the changing distribution of political and economic power in US metropolitan areas.*

In recent decades, U.S. cities have been home to tremendous economic growth—and also, in many cases, to seemingly immutable economic decline. One observer captured this dualism, describing New York as a “colossal synthesis of urban hope and urban despair.” Yet it is not only in New York where one can see both unprecedented opulence and striking poverty within a few city blocks. Over this same period, cities have been primary sites of racial integration, and yet they have also seen many of the country’s fiercest interracial conflicts. Indeed, many of the paradoxes of contemporary American society are most visible in its cities. This course aims to **understand the social and political inequalities that characterize today’s metropolitan areas**, as well as their historical origins. It also considers contemporary trends that could influence urban inequalities, including regionalism, globalization, and immigration. Where do these inequalities originate, and what (if anything) have cities done to address them? Given current trends, should we expect them to grow further?

The course’s central questions include the following: what economic, fiscal, and political constraints are facing contemporary U.S. cities? How do cities compete in the contemporary economy? In what ways do ethnic and racial divisions influence urban life and the future prospects of U.S. cities? How has urban politics been reshaped in recent decades? What role

has urban design played in exacerbating or alleviating the problems faced by cities? And what role might local or regional politics play in solving those problems?

Alongside these substantive aims, this course also aims to **improve students' thinking about research methods** in preparation for the end-of-term research paper and for writing a senior thesis. Throughout the course, students will be exposed to a variety of methods used to research urban America, and will be able to assess their relative strengths and weaknesses. Course discussions will emphasize research methodology alongside the substantive insights provided by the various readings. One advantage to studying urban America is that it requires an interdisciplinary approach.

**Background:** No specific background is required, although coursework in related fields is helpful (e.g. history, political science, sociology, economics). The instructor expects students to be familiar with basic economic principles and the social theory discussed in Social Studies 10.

**Requirements:** Please note that this class cannot be taken pass/fail.

*Presentations:* One student per week will take responsibility for presenting a related, additional reading to the class and discussing its relationship to the material covered in the required readings. These presentations will account for 15% of the course grade.

*Class Preparation:* To guide the discussion, the instructor will ask for brief emails related to the week's topic prior to several class meetings. These emails, along with class preparation and participation, will account for 25% of the term grade. The presenter will be exempt.

*Research Paper:* In consultation with the instructor, students will choose a specific trend, city, or other theme on which to write a research paper. Papers can be primarily political, economic, historical, or sociological in focus. Potential topics include how political decisions have influenced the economy of a specific city, how vote choices in that city have evolved over time, changing patterns of residential segregation, a case study of a particular mayor or citywide campaign, or shifts in the local economy and their broader impacts. **Any urban-related topic approved by the instructor is acceptable, and students are encouraged to choose topics that are closely related to their interests.**

*Paper Outline:* During the ninth week of the term (November 12<sup>th</sup>), students will turn in the first written assignment, which will be 3-5 pages, and which will provide a preview of the final paper, including the theories to be assessed, the evidence to be collected. This will count for 10% of the term grade.

On Thursday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009 by 5 PM, all students will turn in a 15-20 page research paper, which will focus on a specific trend, city, issue, or other theme in the course (40% of term grade).

Time-permitting, students will present their research to the class and solicit feedback in the final weeks of the term.

**Late Papers/Extensions:** Those seeking extensions within 48 hours of a deadline must have the approval of their residential Dean. Late papers without an extension will be assessed a penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade for every day beyond the deadline.

### **Obtaining the Readings**

The books below are available at the Harvard Coop as paperbacks. **Please note that I have reduced the list of required readings, so do not buy every book available at the Coop.**

Thomas Sugrue. 1996. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*.  
Wilson, William J. 1996. *When Work Disappears*.  
Robert O. Self. 2003. *American Babylon*.  
Trounstine, Jessica. 2008. *Political Monopolies in American Cities*  
Peterson, Paul. 1981. *City Limits*.  
Clarence Stone. 1989. *Regime Politics*.  
Altshuler, Alan and David Luberoff. 2003. *Mega-Projects*

In addition, all books assigned have been placed on reserve through the Harvard Library system. Articles denoted with a (\*) are available in PDF form from the instructor; articles and chapters denoted with a (\*\*) will be provided to students.

#### **1. Introduction: Studying Urban America** (September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

#### **2. The Post-War American City: Pluralism in Practice?** (September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

Tiebout, Charles. 1956. "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures." (\*)  
Robert Dahl. 1961. *Who Governs?* Pgs. 311-325 (\*\*)  
Bachrach, Peter and Morton Baratz. 1962. "Two Faces of Power." (\*)  
Rae, Douglas. 2003. *City: Urbanism and Its End*. Pgs. ix-xix, 1-31, 215-253 (\*\*, also online via Hollis)

Recommended:

Crenson, Mathew. 1971. *The Un-politics of Air Pollution*.  
Martin Meyerson and Edward Banfield. 1955. *Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest*  
Lowi, Theodore. 1964. *At the Pleasure of the Mayor*  
Orr, Marion. 1999. *Black Social Capital*

#### **3. Segregation and Deindustrialization: A Historical View** (October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008)

Thomas Sugrue. 1996. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*. Introduction, Chps. 2, 5-9, Conclusion (at Coop, on reserve)  
Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid*. Pgs. 1-82. (on reserve, \*\*)

Recommended:

Rieder, Jonathan. 1985. *Canarsie*.

#### **4. Segregation and Deindustrialization: A Sociological View** (October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

Wilson, William J. 1996. *When Work Disappears*. Pgs. 3-146. (at Coop, on reserve)  
Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid*. Pgs. 83-147. (on reserve, \*\*)

Recommended:

Liebow, Elliot. 1967. *Tally's Corner*  
Cuomo, Mario. 1983. *Forest Hills Diary*.

**5. Urban Governance: The Political Machine** (October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

Trounstine, Jessica. 2008. *Political Monopolies in American Cities*. Excerpts.  
Erie, Stephen. 1988. *Rainbow's End*. Chapter 1. (\*\*)

Recommended:

Bridges, Amy. 1997. *Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest*  
Royko, Mike. 1971. *Boss: Richard J. Daley of Chicago*  
Banfield, Edward. 1961. *Political Influence*  
Bridges, Amy. 1984. *A City in the Republic*  
Cohen, Adam and Elizabeth Taylor. 2000. *American Pharaoh*.

**6. The Power to Redevelop: Urban Neighborhoods** (October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2008)

Caro, Robert. 1974. *The Powerbroker*, Chapters 37-38 (\*\*)  
Jacobs, Jane. 1963. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Pages 4-73 (\*\*)  
Ouroussoff, Nicolai. 2006. "Outgrowing Jane Jacobs and Her New York." *The New York Times*, April 30<sup>th</sup>. (\*)  
Cannato, Vincent. *The Ungovernable City*. Pgs. 75-100. (\*\*)

Recommended:

Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space*  
McKenzie, Evan. 1994. *Privatopia*.

**7. Contemporary Challenges: The Politics of Development** (October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

Altshuler, Alan and David Luberoff. 2003. *Mega-Projects*. Chapters TBA.  
Kagan, Robert. *Adversarial Legalism: The American Way of Law*. Excerpt. (\*\*)

**8. City, Suburb, and Political Mobilization** (November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

Davis, Mike. 1990. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. Pgs. 221-316  
(chapters 4-5)

Recommended:

Gans, Herbert J. 1967. *The Levittowners*  
M.P. Baumgartner, *The Moral Order of a Suburb*

**9. Cities' Economic Subordination?** (November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

Peterson, Paul. 1981. *City Limits*. Chps. 1-9.

Recommended: Mollenkopf, John. *The Contested City*.

**10. Urban Regimes and Political Possibilities** (November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

Clarence Stone. 1989. *Regime Politics*. Chps. 1-2, 4-7, 9-12.

Recommended:

Mollenkopf, John. 1992. *A Phoenix in the Ashes*  
Kaufmann, Karen. 2004. *The Urban Voter*  
Sonenshein, Raphael. 1993. *Politics in Black and White*

*3-5 page paper outlines due Friday, November 14<sup>th</sup>*

**11. Fragmentation and Regionalism** (December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008)

Robert O. Self. 2003. *American Babylon*. Introduction. Chps. 1, 3-7, Conclusion.  
Dreier, Peter et al. 2001. *Place Matters*. Chapter 6. (\*\*)  
Margaret Weir, "Coalition Building for Regionalism," in Katz, ed. *Reflections on Regionalism*, 127-153 (\*\*)

Recommended:

Frug, Gerald. 2002. *Harvard Law Review*. "Beyond Regional Government"  
Frug, Gerald *City Making*  
J. Eric Oliver, *Democracy in Suburbia*, 187-215  
Orfield, Myron. *Metropolitics: The New Suburban Reality*

**12. Contemporary Challenges: Globalization and Immigration** (December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

Sassen, Sakia. 2001. *Global City*. Part I  
Jones-Correa, Michael. 1998. *Between Two Nations*. 1-34, 69-106 (\*\*)