CRP 1100 - THE AMERICAN CITY
165 McGraw Hall, MWF 10:10 – 11am, 3 credits

Instructor: Visiting Lecturer Katelin Olson,
Department of City and Regional Planning

Office: West Sibley 317
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Course Overview

The American City is an introductory undergraduate lecture and discussion course that surveys the phenomenon of American urbanization, broadly considering its evolution over the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and engaging in a vibrant assessment of the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century city. It is the first required course for the Urban and Regional Studies (URS) major offered by the Department of City and Regional Planning. In addition, the College of Arts and Sciences identifies this course as one that satisfies the Social and Behavioral Analysis (SBA) distribution requirement. Graduate students may not enroll in this course.
Urbanization is the dominant settlement pattern in the United States, with over 80% of Americans living in either urban or suburban environs. We have also passed the 50% threshold of the world’s population residing in urban settings. Indeed, the 21st century may be remembered globally as the “Century of the City,” and understanding domestic decision-making and urbanization impacts will be of interest to a broad range of liberal arts and scientific fields. How has this phenomenon manifested in America? What are the implications of urbanization for city, suburban, and rural stakeholders?

We will focus on how physical aspects of the city (sewer systems, transportation networks, etc.) and abstract responsibilities (public health, policing, etc.) interact with social, cultural, environmental, economic, and political values, effecting both the material development of the urban environment and the quality of life of its inhabitants.

Throughout the course, we shall consider how societal values and ideals have motivated urban policy debates and decisions. The impacts of technology, immigration, religion, urban history, economics, politics and industrialization will be interwoven and assessed for both their deliberate and unexpected effects on American urbanization. Each week will focus on a different urban theme, providing an opportunity to understand its historical development, accompanying social impacts, and contemporary perspectives.

Office Hours and Meetings

My office hours are Wednesdays from 11am-12pm and Fridays from 11am-1pm. Other meetings arranged by appointment.

T.A.s

James McMillian (jjm458) and Yunji Kim (yk634), Ph.Ds in City and Regional Planning, are primarily assigned to the course to assist with grading, provide writing help to students, and lead discussion groups. Their office hours are by appointment. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with them for assistance with their papers.

Blackboard

We have a course Blackboard site that is accessible via www.blackboard.cornell.edu. All assignments will be turned in via Blackboard (with the exception of the optional paper rewrite), graded and returned to students electronically. Electronic copies of the course syllabus, class files, many of the readings, discussion schedules and other pertinent information will be posted on site. If you are enrolled in the course through Student Center, you should be automatically enrolled in the course on Blackboard. If not, please contact James or Yunji immediately.
Grading

Grades for the course will be determined in the following manner: four papers (50%), mid-term exam (15%), final exam (15%), journal, class/discussion participation and attendance (20%).

Only letter grades will be assigned (no pass/fail), and will be based on the following rubric:

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Electronics Policy

No electronic devices (laptops, tablets, etc.) shall be used during the course unless individually approved, as I've found this to be a distraction from attentive class engagement and participation.

Readings

It is essential that students complete all of the readings in advance of each class meeting and discussion section. The majority of the readings are available via Blackboard, with the exception of readings taken from the following anthologies and four books. These anthologies are available on reserve in the Fine Arts Library, along with the four other required texts.

Anthologies:

The following books can be purchased at the Cornell Bookstore and are also on reserve in the Fine Arts Library:


From time to time, pertinent news articles or other short readings will be circulated for discussion and possible incorporation into journal assignments. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the free copies of *The New York Times* available at stands throughout campus.

**Journal and Lectures**

Most Sundays a question will be posted on Blackboard that refers to that week’s readings. Students will be responsible for uploading a response by the following Sunday by 8pm E.S.T., to be submitted via Blackboard. These entries form the journal and they are intended to help you think critically about the readings, class lectures, themes, and issues of that particular week. These can be helpful references in preparation for the midterms and finals. In order to receive full credit, entries (a Word Document that is either 1 single-spaced page or 2 double-spaced pages, 12pt font, similar to Times New Roman) must be submitted by the deadline unless the student has an approved excuse. Journal submissions up to a week late can receive a maximum grade of 50%, and delays beyond 7 days results in an automatic zero for that assignment. (Approved excuses, of course, are the exception.) Each student is allowed to skip one journal entry without penalization.

Material from the lectures is not duplicated in the readings, and will be drawn upon in the midterm and finals. Students are strongly encouraged to take detailed notes, and those who miss class will be expected to obtain copies of the lecture notes from another student. Many classes will involve a discussion component.

**Discussion Sections and Class Participation**

Class participation is based on a combination of attendance (taken at the beginning of each class), discussion section participation, class discussion participation, the journal (already discussed) and the map quiz. Students are expected to attend class (on time) unless they have an excused absence. Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student’s grade.
There are three discussion sections (up to 20 students/each) that are each scheduled seven times throughout the semester. Students will be able to choose their sections during the second week of classes. These sections will meet for 50 minutes and are offered at a variety of times: 4pm on select Wednesdays, 8pm on select Wednesdays, and 9am on select Fridays. Students are allowed to miss one of the seven discussions without penalty. All others are mandatory, unless a student has an excused absence.

**Papers**

Students will be responsible for completing four (4) papers, each of five (5) pages. Specific details regarding each assignment will be posted on Blackboard a minimum of two weeks before the deadline, and will draw on the course material and independent research. Additionally, students will have an opportunity to rewrite any of the first three (3) papers for a replacement grade. See the course schedule for the deadlines.

Every student is required to meet with me in advance of the deadline of the first paper. Afterwards, any student who received a B- or lower on the preceding paper will need to submit a 1-page, double-spaced paper proposal for the next assignment and meet with a TA to discuss its development. More information on those deadlines and specifics will be circulated in class.

All papers (with the exception of the optional rewrite) will be submitted in Word format via Blackboard by 9:30AM on the deadline. Unexcused papers will be penalized a partial grade (i.e. a “B+” becomes a B, etc.) for each day they are late. Learning to plan ahead is an important skill, and the structure of the course gives you many weeks to plan for an on-time (or early!) delivery.

**Plagiarism and the Code of Academic Integrity**

Quotes are great! Pretending someone else’s work is your own is not. Plagiarism is a very serious offence and can result in failing the course. If you have any questions about how to correctly attribute someone else’s work, please see me or the TAs. It is expected that work submitted is solely your own and that any quotes and ideas by others are correctly attributed to the correct author.
**Week 1: America’s Urban Origins**

**Wednesday, August 26** – Introduction and Course Overview

**Friday, August 28** – Pre-Columbian and Colonial Urbanism, 15th-17th centuries

- *The Constitution of Plymouth Colony, 1636.*

**Week 2: America’s Urban Origins**

**Monday, August 31** – 18th Century Colonial and Early Republican Urbanism


**Wednesday, September 2** – American Cities, pre-Civil War

- Sylvia D. Fries, *The Urban Idea in Colonial America* (Temple, 1977), “Savannah,” pp. 144-157. (Note: The entire chapter is provided, but the sections outside the assigned pages are optional.)

**Friday, September 4** – View in class a segment of Christopher Moore (et. all), *The African Burial Ground: An American Discovery,* (Brooklyn N.Y.: Longtail Distribution, 2009). Discussion session on urban archaeology and our evolving understanding of “urbanism.”


**Week 3: City Politics, Government and Finances**

Monday, September 7 – NO CLASS/LABOR DAY.

Wednesday, September 9 - Immigration and Decision-Making

- **Map Quiz** *(in class)*

Friday, September 11 - The “Nuts and Bolts” of Contemporary City Government


Ongoing reading assignment: Buzz Bissinger, A Prayer for the City, pp. 49-100.

**Week 4: People on the Move**

Monday, September 14 – Transportation Systems, Pre-Automobile

Wednesday, September 16 – Library Research Skills, in-class presentation by Marsha E. Taichman (Fine Arts Library) and Boris Michev (Olin Library).

Friday, September 18 – Transportation Systems in the Age of the Automobile


**Week 5: Home, Sweet Home**

Monday, September 21: Housing in the City, c. 1800-1900


Wednesday, September 23: Housing in the City, c. 1900-1945


Friday, September 25: Living With(in) the City, 1945-2015


**Week 6: Inhabiting the City**

Monday, September 28: Creating Citizens in the 19th Century

**PAPER 1 DUE VIA BLACKBOARD BY 9:30AM.**

• Video, “The Life and Work of Jane Adams,” (~5 minutes) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tw4GZeABlNI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tw4GZeABlNI).

**Wednesday, September 30: 19th and 20th Century labor**

**Friday, October 2: Beyond Manufacturing: Laboring in the 21st Sector Service Economy (Discussion)**


**Week 7: Building Up**

**Monday, October 5 – NO CLASS/OCTOBER BREAK**

**Wednesday, October 7 – Rise of Downtown (c.1880–1930)**

**Friday, October 9 – MIDTERM**

**Week 8: Urban Necessities**

Monday, October 12: Quenching the Thirst of a City

Wednesday, October 14: Cleanliness is Next to...Impossible

Friday, October 16: Energizing the City


**Week 9: Outward Bound**

Monday, October 19 - At Play in the Early 20th century

**PAPER 2 DUE VIA BLACKBOARD BY 9:30AM.**


Wednesday, October 21 – Suburbanization (Levittown, new communities designed exclusively around the car, suburban amenities)

Friday, October 23 – Films: *No Time for Ugliness* (1965) by the American Institute of Architects. (~23 minutes); *The Pruitt Igoe Myth* (2011) (~25 minutes).

**Week 10: Mid-Century Upheaval**

**Monday, October 26 – Urban Impermanence**


**Wednesday, October 28 – Urban Unrest**


**Friday, October 30 – Burying Bones (Happy Halloween!)**


**Week 11: Rights to the City Spaces**

**Monday, November 2 – The City of Pleasure**

- “Congress Threatens to Leave D.C. Unless New Capitol is Built,” *The Urban Politics Reader*, pp. 189-190.

**Wednesday, November 4 – Education: Pay to Play, Charter Schools, Hollowing out of Municipal services, gentrification (discussion)**


**Friday, November 6**—“Guest Lecture: Following Detroit's Planners,” by James Macmillen, Department of City and Regional Planning.

**Ongoing reading assignment**: Alan Ehrenhalt, *The Great Inversion*, pp. 3-62.

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**Week 12: Catastrophe**

**Monday, November 9**—Catastrophic Urban Moments

**PAPER 3 DUE VIA BLACKBOARD BY 9:30AM.**


**Wednesday, November 11** – Sustained Urban Crises Urban


**Friday, November 13** – Compartmentalized Violence (Discussion)


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**Week 13: Claiming the City**

**Monday, November 16** – Shifting Demography


**Wednesday, November 18 – Transitioning Multiculturalism**

**Friday, November 20 – Guest Lecture by Yunji Kim, Department of City and Regional Planning**

**PAPER REWRITE DUE IN CLASS.**


**Week 14: The City of Today?**

**Monday, November 23 – Informal Adaptations**

**Wednesday, November 25 – NO CLASS/THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**Friday, November 27 – NO CLASS/THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**Week 15: Imagining the City of the Future**

**Monday, November 30 – Conceptions of the “Modern City”**
In-class Films: *Futurama* (1939); *The City* (1939)

**Wednesday, December 2 – 21st Century Urbanism Trends**

**Friday, December 4 – Discussion of films and final papers on future city issues. How much power/agency do cities have to affect change?**

**PAPER 4 DUE VIA BLACKBOARD BY 9:30AM.**