SOCIAL JUSTICE AND URBAN ISSUES:  THE CASE OF WASHINGTON, D.C. AND ITS ENVIRONS

City and Regional Planning 3854 • American Studies 3854 • Government 3494
Cornell in Washington • Spring 2015
Monday, 7:00-9:30pm

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Course Description

This seminar, a core course for the Cornell Urban Scholars Program, explores the relationship between the urban setting and the culture and identity of its inhabitants. Of particular interest are the health of a community and the quality of life of the residents. The course will explore characteristics of society and culture as well as the built environment. The course presents the context of social, economic, political, and other issues that contribute to barriers or opportunities for urban life in the United States. These concepts will be integrated with community-based learning pedagogy. A community-based project provides students with opportunities for self-reflection, community involvement and hands-on research in the classroom. Washington, D.C. and its environs will be the focus of class discussions and exercises.

For anyone interested in the theory and practice of democracy, the Washington, D.C. metro area provides an ideal laboratory. The capital of a global superpower, the center of political power in the United States, the quality of life and composition of metro Washington’s communities shifts dramatically from neighborhood to neighborhood. After decades of unrest and population loss, the city is now growing steadily, as evidenced by gentrification, new construction, a soaring cost of living, and the displacement of historic urban populations. Despite being the capital of the United States, the District of Columbia was only granted limited home rule by Congress in 1973, and even that autonomy remains highly circumscribed and fiercely contested.

This semester, we will provide students with an introduction to the political, social, economic, and cultural ecosystem that comprises the Washington, D.C. metro area. As in any ecosystem, the whole is defined by its intersections – in this case, of place and space, of power and identity. We will investigate the diverse sources of change in the region, examining top-down legal and institutional power, community organizing from the grassroots up, and the ever-growing third sector web of nonprofit organizations, foundations, corporations, and other civic participants. While we will focus on urgent contemporary issues such as housing education, employment, health care, immigration, policing, and transportation, we will also explore those historical contexts that set the stage for present-day conditions and debates. Finally, we will consider how “community” can be understood as a verb rather than a noun – as something that happens (consciously and not), that is constantly shifting and contested, rather than existing as some static, self-evident entity.
Participants in this seminar will be expected to be co-facilitators in the class, to be active knowledge creators. Students will draw upon our readings, on their own experience in other coursework and area internships, and upon the series of guest practitioners who will share their experience and understanding of the Washington, D.C. area. We will ask students to suggest some of the readings for our discussions, and may adjust the syllabus in accordance with students’ areas of interest and/or major developments in the news.

**Course Materials**

Our course will be hosted on Confluence at https://confluence.cornell.edu/display/CRP3854sp15/. In general, we will post PDF files of book chapters and scholarly articles to the site, as well as links to assigned news articles, radio and video documentaries, and other multimedia sources.

**Requirements & Assignments**

*Seminar Participation/Facilitation (35%)*

- Includes active participation and consistent attendance; identifying additional readings and/or other texts for two sessions of class in consultation with the instructors, and designing discussion questions for those weeks

*Reflective Papers (30%)*

- Four papers of 1000-1250 words each, due in class for sessions of students’ choosing. Two will be submitted before March 15 and two will be submitted after March 15. One of the four papers should be written in the form of an entry for the CIW blog.

*Community-Based Project (35%)*

- Over the course of the semester, students will design, develop, and complete a community-based research project. Each student’s research may be supplemented by seminar readings and discussions, presentations by guest practitioners, and their own internships/other community-based work.
- These semester projects can take various forms, including policy briefs, curriculum development projects, documentary projects (*e.g.*, oral history projects, radio projects/podcasts), or other formats proposed by students and approved by the instructors. We will discourage traditional research papers for this assignment.
- There is no pre-determined required word count in advance for this project. Instead, format and scope of each project will be negotiated between students and the instructors.
- Due dates:
  - Preliminary project proposal due Fri., March 9.
  - Project update with in-progress bibliography due in class, Mon., April 13.
  - Final project due Sun., May 10
Students with Disabilities

Please give the instructors your Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation letter early in the semester so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic modifications. Meeting with us in office hours will help ensure confidentiality. If you need an immediate accommodation for equal access, please speak with the instructors after class, or send an email message to us and/or SDS at sds_cu@cornell.edu. If the need arises for additional accommodations during the semester, please contact SDS.

Academic Integrity:

It should go without saying that cheating, plagiarism, and aiding and abetting harm the free exchange of ideas and attack the very foundation of academic life. All students are responsible for informing themselves about the University’s policies regarding academic dishonesty. Neither the University, the Cornell in Washington Program, nor the instructors will tolerate academic dishonesty, and students found to have violated the campus policies will face severe penalties, ranging from receiving no credit for the assignment to failing the course to possible suspension or expulsion. Complete citation of your own submitted work is a basic expectation of this course, and work failing to include such citations will both receive a lower grade and draw attention for review for possible violations of academic honesty policies. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the instructors, and please review the policies online at http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm.

Use of Technology in the Classroom

To have an effective learning community, we all need to devote our full attention to our limited time together. Your use of technology in the classroom can both enhance and interfere with your learning, as well as the learning of your classmates. To that end, please observe the following guidelines in this class. You may use a laptop or tablet computer (with sound muted, please) to refer to readings, compile notes, or otherwise assist with your preparation, participation, and learning. Please do not text, iMessage, etc., and please do not use laptops or tablets to check email/Facebook/Twitter, read the news, play Candy Crush, look at awkward cat pictures, etc. Unless you are on call or have truly extenuating circumstances (e.g., a sick family member), please keep your phone either off or on vibrate, and out of sight. Please also consider letting your friends, family members, supervisor(s), and other colleagues know you are unavailable during class time.

Other Classroom Guidelines:

Given the time of our weekly seminar, you are welcome to bring food and/or drink to class, as long as you abide by the campers’ credo to “pack it in, pack it out,” and leave no trace at the end of the seminar. If students leave our classroom a mess for others to clean up, we reserve the right to prohibit food and drink for all students.
Schedule of Classes & Readings

• Subject to revision at the discretion of the instructors; changes will be announced as far in advance as possible.
• Readings should be completed by the seminar of the given day.

PART I
SOCIAL LANDSCAPES AND CULTURAL CROSSROADS, PAST AND PRESENT

JANUARY 26 (CLASS #1): INTRODUCTIONS

• Whitney Pipkin, “8 Development Projects That Will Transform DC This Year” (www.elevationdcmedia.com/features/devprojects_011315.aspx)

FEBRUARY 2 (CLASS #2): PLACE AND SPACE

• Howard Gillette, Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C., chapters 1-2
• Andrew Stephen, “Georgetown’s Hidden History”
• Alex Kellogg, “D.C., Long ‘Chocolate City,’ Becoming More Vanilla”
• NPR, “America’s Shifting Population” (select District of Columbia)
• Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, “Struggling Over History in a Gentrifying D.C.”

FEBRUARY 9 (CLASS #3): POWER AND IDENTITY

• Cameron Logan, “Beyond a Boundary: Washington’s Historic Districts and Their Racial Contents”
• Kwame Holmes, “From Chocolate to Rainbow City,” chapter 4
• Patrick R. Grzanka (ed.), Intersectionality, chapters TBA

FEBRUARY 16: no class – Presidents’ Day
Friday, February 20 (Class #4): Sources of Change

- Mallory Ortberg, “Eric Garner’s Killer Won’t Be Indicted”
- INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (ed.), The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex, chapters divided among students.
- Charles Payne, I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle, chapter 3
- Robin D.G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South”

Part II

Power, Policy, and Everyday Life in Washington, D.C.

February 23 (Class #5): The City in Motion: Living in Washington, D.C. (I)

- Howard Gillette, Between Justice and Beauty, chapters 8-10
- Brett Williams, Upscaling Downtown: Stalled Gentrification in Washington, D.C., chapters 3-4, 6
- Liam O’Donoghue, “Don’t Call It Gentrification”
- Shani O. Hilton, “Confessions of a Black Gentrifier”

March 2 (Class #6): The City in Motion: Living in Washington, D.C. (II)

- Sabiyha Prince, African Americans and Gentrification in Washington, D.C., chapters 5-6
- Case studies (developed in consultation with the instructors). Recommend topics include, but are not limited to:
  - the gentrification of the U Street NW Corridor
  - the gentrification of the H Street NE Corridor
  - the building of the Nationals and DC United Stadiums
  - the history and future of the Washington Metro
  - our own neighborhood: Dupont Circle
  - gentrification and LGBT neighborhoods
  - gentrification and homelessness/transient housing
  - other neighborhood case studies, e.g. Takoma Park, Columbia Heights, Alexandria, Southeast
**March 9 (Class #7): Education**

- PBS, *The Education of Michelle Rhee*
- William Ayers *et al.*, *City Kids, City Schools: More Reports from the Front Row*, excerpts.
- Teach for America, “Our Mission” and “Why Teach for America”
- Alexandra Hootnick, “Teachers Are Losing Their Jobs, But Teach For America is Expanding. What’s Wrong With That?”
- George Joseph, “This is What Happens When You Criticize Teach for America”

Optional

- *The Atlantic* on Michelle Rhee (read in order):
  - Nathan Tobey, “Michelle Rhee: Separating the Truth from the Hype” (2013)

**preliminary project proposal due in class March 9**

**March 16 (Class #8): Economic Opportunity: Service Industry**

- Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickled and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, Introduction and chapter 3
- William Julius Wilson, “When Work Disappears”
- Kike Arnal, *In the Shadow of Power: Poverty in Washington, D.C.*
- Josh Eidelson, “Veto Decision Looms for DC Retail Living Wage Bill”
- Mike DeBonis, “D.C. Mayor Gray Vetoes ‘Living Wage’ Bill Aimed at Wal-Mart, Setting Up Decisive Council Vote”

**March 23 (Class #9): Immigration**

- Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City*, chapters 5, 7-8
- Armando Trull, “Voices from El Salvador” series
- Case studies covering metro D.C., developed in consultation with the instructors

**March 30: no class – spring break**
**APRIL 6 (CLASS #10): POLICING & PRISONS**

- Penelope Saunders and Jennifer Kirby, “Move Along: Community-Based Research into the Policing of Sex Work in Washington, D.C.”
- Radley Balko, “How Municipalities in St. Louis County, Mo., Profit from Poverty”
- Molly Knefel, “The School-to-Prison Pipeline: A Nationwide Problem for Equal Rights”

Optional

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

**PART III**

**INTERSECTIONS: HEALTH, COMMUNITY, AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES**

**APRIL 13 (CLASS #11): THE WARS COME HOME**

- Matthieu Aikins, “Afghanistan: The Makings of a Narco State”
- David Amsden, “The New Face of Heroin”
- Jess Matthews, oral history interview with a veteran about treating overdoses in Afghans
- Lee N. Robins *et al.*, “Drug Use by U.S. Army Enlisted Men in Vietnam: A Follow-up on Their Return Home”
- “The War Within: Portraits of Vietnam Veterans Fighting Heroin Addiction”
- Ben Cimons, “The Lure of Heroin: Painfully Addictive and Difficult to Quit”
- Shaun McCanna, “It’s Easy for Soldiers to Score Heroin in Afghanistan”
- Scott Keyes, “In Just 100 Days, DC Finds Homes for More Than 200 Homeless Veterans”
- Aaron Wiener, “D.C.’s First Supportive Housing for Homeless Veterans Breaks Ground”

**Project update with bibliography due in class April 13**
APRIL 20 (CLASS #12): THE EPIDEMIC AT HOME

- Jose Antonio Vargas and Darryl Fears, “HIV/AIDS Rate in D.C. Hits 3%”
- Lena H. Sun, “In D.C., HIV Infection Rate Nearly Doubles for Some Poor Black Women”
- *Washington Post*, “Failing the Sick in an Ailing City” (videos/multiple articles)
- Gregorio Millett et al., “Greater Risk for HIV Infection of Black Men Who Have Sex With Men”
- Jeff Gua, “The Black HIV Epidemic”
- Tim Fitzimons, “Striving to Get to ‘HIV Zero’”

APRIL 27 (CLASS #13): OUR BODIES, OUR COMMUNITIES: REPRODUCTIVE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- Brett Williams, “A River Runs Through Us”
- “Integrate Strategies to Improve Environmental and Reproductive Justice”
- David Plotz, “Working: Dr. Meri Kolbrener”
- [additional readings to be added]

PART IV
LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

MAY 4 (CLASS #14): STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

SUNDAY, MAY 10: SEMESTER PROJECTS DUE