

Urbs/Hist 210: The City

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How do we “read” a city? What is the relationship between downtown and suburb, rowhouse and ranch house, shopping district and mall, gated community and public plaza? What is the meaning of place (“neighborhood” or “home”) and how are our lives defined by it? How do we function as both the producers and products of place? How does the hand of the past shape the present? Through reading sociological, historical, theoretical, and primary texts, maps and photographs, and through your ethnographic explorations and tours of the city, we will explore the presence of the past in the city around us, the evolution of social, spatial and physical systems, different kinds of urban and suburban places, and the encoding of wealth and power as well as inequality and poverty on the urban landscape.

Please note that this class is a seminar; its success depends on students’ willingness to come to class having completed the reading, thought about the question of the day, and being prepared to participate in discussion.

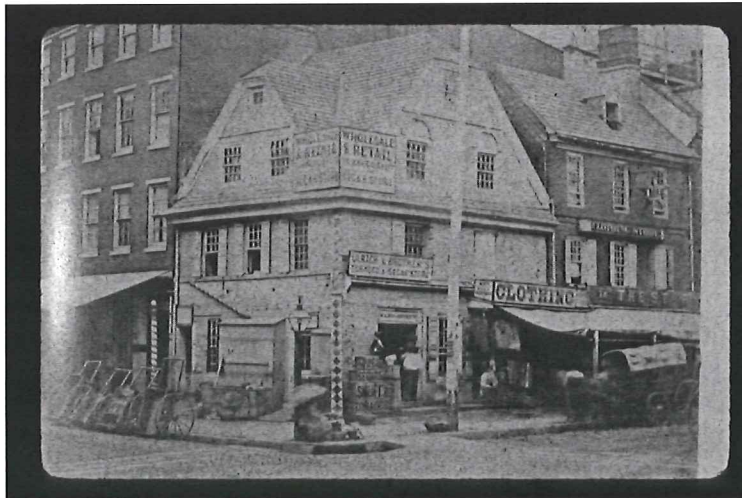


Photo: The Old London Coffee House, Front and Market, built 1702, photo c. 1860, where merchants auctioned “goods,” including slaves. Ulrich and Bros. took over the establishment in 1813; building was demolished in 1883.

This course examines the city as an expression of physical, social and spatial systems that have evolved over time. The city as a **physical system** is the most obvious since we use its streets, drink its water, and live in its buildings, and this is the clearest expression of

the past in the contemporary city as we confront the use and re-use of these spaces. People constitute the city as a **social system** over time as they form communities and those communities persist or depart. The relics of that social system are apparent, for example, in an “Italian Market” that is not very Italian, or in a Baptist church with a Star of David over its entry, but a social system is also apparent in the ways in which people interact in their daily lives and in their use of public space. We will explore both the historical and the contemporary social systems of the city. The city as a **spatial system** is an expression of economic relations, of downtowns, strip malls, abandoned mills, and gentrified neighborhoods, of capital invested and extracted. This spatial system has accreted over time as different economic eras—preindustrial, industrial, post-industrial—and different technologies have left their mark on the city, and it is at this level that one can see the effects of power and poverty. In sum, the city is a text and we will learn to read its pages.

Since we believe cities are best learned by experience, we will use Philadelphia whenever possible to illustrate themes of physical, social and spatial change. **Be forewarned** that we will have seven tours that will occur during class time, and one or two may involve getting back to campus slightly after our usual 4:30 end time. These are integral parts of the class, so please adjust your calendars accordingly. In addition, there are two ethnographic assignments (see requirements below) that will demand that you spend time observing, analyzing and writing about the urban landscape.

Please note: turn off all electronic devices (laptops, cell phones, PDAs, etc.) in class.

Requirements:

A. Discussion leading, discussion questions and class participation (40%). In a seminar, all members of the class have to engage with the reading in a critical fashion and be prepared to discuss it. Student teams will lead discussions once during the semester.

B. Ethnographic writing assignments (25%). We want you to complete two ethnographic writing assignments. You will want to take field notes of your observations, (a small notebook in which you can jot your observations would be helpful for this) and these observations will form the basis for writing your papers.

The **first assignment** involves reading selections from Jane Jacobs, Death and Life of Great American Cities, Grady Clay, Close Up: How to Read the American City and the introduction to Elijah Anderson, Code of the Street. You should pick a commercial block in West Philadelphia and analyze it for its social interactions, which you will record in your field notes, and draw a map of the physical spaces on the block. This will form the basis of your first 1-3 page ethnographic observation.

The **second assignment** is a comparison of two shopping streets/districts, one a neighborhood commercial block (i.e. the one you picked for the first assignment) and a “downtown” shopping street such as the 1700 block of Walnut Street or 10th Street between Race and Market. The intent is to compare shopping experiences by examining

the interactions between sellers and buyers and among pedestrians while analyzing class, race, and gender patterns that you record in your field notes. The introduction to Anderson's Code of the Street and his essay "The Cosmopolitan Canopy" will help orient you to this assignment, which should be no more than 3-5 pages in length.

C. Place Project (15%). Students will be grouped in teams of two or three to research the history and current use of a "place" in the city. The project involves looking at the historical evolution of the site, its changing population characteristics, its current use, interactions at the site today, and a visual representation of the site. Your research will culminate in a presentation to the class in the form of a powerpoint presentation or a poster. We will have a session in the library with the reference librarian for urban studies to help you find resources for your research. Links to photographic, demographic and other sources can be found on the course blackboard site.

D. Final Exam (20%). Just to keep you honest. The final will ask you to synthesize your work for the semester. **You are advised to take notes on your reading that summarize the main themes/arguments.**

I expect that you will adhere to the strictest standards of academic integrity in all of your work. Students may work together on certain projects, but all written work must be completed individually. Any student who is found to have violated the university's code will fail the class. If you need help in learning how to cite materials, the library has a helpful website at <http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/PORT/documentation/>

Reading:

There are three basic texts for the semester available at House of Our Own Bookstore. There are significant additional readings on Canvas, noted as electronic reserve (ER) on the syllabus. Please complete all reading assignments prior to class.

Fox Butterfield, All God's Children: The Boskett Family and the American Tradition of Violence (Avon Books, 1996).

Alison Isenberg, Downtown America: A history of the place and the people who made it (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Eric C. Schneider, Smack: Heroin and the American City (Penn Press, 2008).

Class Schedule:

Jan 16: Introduction

The Preindustrial City, 1670-1840:

Jan 21: Preindustrial Philadelphia [lecture/discussion]

Reading: Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography, pp. 24-36 (ER); Billy G. Smith, "Walking Morale's Streets: Philadelphia," Common-Place 3 (July, 2003) (ER); Steven Conn, Metropolitan Philadelphia: Living with the Presence of the Past, pp. 29-45 (ER); Sam Bass Warner, Jr., "The Environment of Private Opportunity," pp. 3-21, in The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth (ER).

Question: How does the walking city differ from our own?

Jan 23: Experiencing Change: Religion and Class [student discussion]

Reading: Michael Feldberg, The Turbulent Era, pp. 9-53, 84-103 (ER).

Question: What is the relationship between collective violence and social change?

Jan 28: Reading the City **ethnography 1 due**

Reading: Jane Jacobs, Death and Life of Great American Cities, pp. 37-53; 65-71; 76-96 (ER); Grady Clay, Close-up: How to Read the American City, pp. 38-52 (ER); Elijah Anderson, Code of the Street, pp. 15-34 (ER).

The Industrial City, 1840-1940:

Jan 30: Violence and the City [student discussion]

Reading: Fox Butterfield, All God's Children, prologue-p. 175

Question: How does a culture of violence develop and get transmitted over generations?

Feb 4: Violence, part II [lecture/discussion]

Reading: Fox Butterfield, All God's Children, pp. 176-331.

Question: Could the stories of Butch and/or Willie have turned out differently? If so, how and at what point?

Feb 6: Making Middle Class Philadelphia [student discussion]

Reading: Gunthar Barth, "The Department Store," pp. 110-47, in City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America (ER); John Henry Hepp, "Introduction: A Revised and Enlarged Philadelphia," pp. 1-18, and "A Sober Paper," pp. 89-114, in The Middle-Class City: Transforming Space and Time in Philadelphia, 1876-1926 (ER).

Question: What does it mean to be middle class?

Feb 11: Landscapes of Death

tour of Woodlands

Reading: Blanche Linden, Silent City on a Hill: Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery, pp. 81-131 (ER); David Schuyler, "The Evolution of the Anglo-American Rural Cemetery: Landscape Architecture as Social and Cultural History," Journal of Garden History, 4, pp. 291-304 (ER); J.B. Jackson, The Necessity for Ruins, pp. 89-102 (ER).

Question: How is culture inscribed in landscape?

Feb 13: Race and Class in W.E.B. DuBois' Philadelphia [student discussion]

Reading: W.E.B. Du Bois, The Philadelphia Negro, pp. 58-70 (ER); William Z. Foster, Pages from a Worker's Life, pp. 15-18 (ER); Dennis Clark, "'Ramcat' and Rittenhouse Square: Related Communities," pp. 125-40, in William Cutler III and Howard Gillette, The Divided Metropolis: Social and Spatial Dimensions of Philadelphia, 1800-1975 (ER).

Question: How does working class experience differ by race?

Feb 18: Downtown [student discussion]

Reading: Alison Isenberg, Downtown America, pp. 1-123.

Question: Who defined "downtown"?

Feb 20: Philadelphia's Downtown: walking tour, 5th and Market to City Hall

Reading: Isenberg, Downtown America, pp. 124-165.

Feb 25: Remaking Downtown [lecture/discussion]

Reading: Alison Isenberg, Downtown America, pp. 165-254

Question: While the economic value of downtown is fairly obvious, what are the other reasons we value it?

Feb 27: Parks and the Urban Landscape [lecture/discussion]

Reading: Matthew Gandy, "Symbolic Order and the Urban Pastoral," Concrete and Clay, pp. 77-113 (ER); Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, "Introduction," and "Whose Park is it anyway?," The Park and the People, pp. 1-11; 505-530 (ER); Elizabeth Milroy, "Pro Bono Publico: Ecology, History and the Creation of Philadelphia's Fairmount Park System," Nature's Entrepot: Philadelphia's Urban Sphere and its Environmental Thresholds, pp. 35-54 (ER).

Question: Is it fair to argue that public/private partnerships are an artificial substitute for a true public realm?

Mar 4: Tour of Fairmount Park

[bus]

Reading: Elijah Anderson, "The Cosmopolitan Canopy," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, pp. 14-31 (ER).

ethnography 2 due

Mar 6: Autopia: Into the modern [student discussion]

Reading: Matthew Gandy, "Technological Modernism and the Urban Parkway," Concrete and Clay, pp. 115-52 (ER).

Question: What has been the role of the car in American culture and society?

SELECTION OF PLACES DUE

Mar 8-16: SPRING BREAK

Mar 18: Library Session: learning about place GOLDSTEIN ELECTRONIC CLASSROOM, VAN PELT LIBRARY

The Post-Industrial City, 1940-present:

Mar 20: Drugs and Youth [student discussion]

Reading: Eric Schneider, Smack, p. ix-115.

Question: What are the implications of treating addiction as a social disease?

Mar 25: Kensington Tour

Mar 27: Addiction and the City [lecture/discussion]

Reading: Schneider, Smack, pp. 116-204.

Question: What is the appropriate balance between a supply-side oriented public policy and a demand-side oriented public policy on drugs?

April 1: Postindustrial decline [student discussion]

Reading: Howard Gillette, Camden After the Fall, pp. 1-61 (ER).

Question: How might whites and blacks see urban crisis differently?

April 3: Camden Tour

Reading: Gillette, Camden After the Fall, pp. 169-187 (ER).

April 8: The University and the City [student discussion]

Reading: Margaret Pugh O'Mara, "Discovering the City of Knowledge," pp. 1-13, and "Building 'Brainsville': The University of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia," pp. 142-81, in Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley (ER).

Question: How do we assess the university as a source for change?

April 10: Public Housing: Mill Creek Tour

Reading: Ann Whiston Spirn, "Restoring Mill Creek," Nature's Entrepot: Philadelphia's Urban Sphere and its Environmental Thresholds, pp. 207-30 (ER); John Bauman, Norman Hummon and Edward Miller, "Public Housing, Isolation, and the Urban Underclass: Philadelphia's Richard Allen Homes, 1945-1961," Journal of Urban History, 17 (1991) (ER); John Bauman, "Safe and Sanitary without the Costly Frills: The Evolution of Public Housing in Philadelphia, 1929-1941," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 101 (January 1977).

Question: How did race confound the expectation that residents in public housing would be only living there temporarily?

Apr 15: Tour of Woodland Ave and new immigration

Reading: Domenic Vitiello, "The Politics of Place in Immigrant and Receiving Communities," pp. 1-38 (ER); Joseph Takougang and Bassirou Tidjani, "Settlement Patterns and Organizations among African Immigrants in the United States," Journal of

Third World Studies, 26, (2009): 31-40 (ER); Daniel Amsterdam and Domenic Vitiello, "Immigration (1930-present)," The Encyclopedia of Philadelphia (ER).

Question: What accounts for the relative hostility to immigration in Philadelphia?

Apr 17: Modern Suburbia [student discussion]

Reading: Joan Didion, "Where I was From," pp. 93-152 (ER).

Question: Has the American Dream been foreclosed?

Apr 22: Tour Renewing Philadelphia

Reading: Steven Conn, "The Naked City and the Story of Decline," in Metropolitan Philadelphia: Living with the Presence of the Past, pp. 247-252 (ER); Harris Steinberg, "Philadelphia in the Year 2059," in Imagining Philadelphia: Edmund Bacon and the Future of the City, pp. 112-144 (ER).

Question: What is the future of Philadelphia?

April 24: Place Project presentations

April 29: Place Project presentations