

**URBS104 / HIST153:
The Transformation of Urban America**

Instructor: Davy Knittle
dknittle@sas.upenn.edu
Office hours: Monday 1-3 or by appointment
Office: McNeil Hall 130
(Urban Studies Seminar Room)

TA: Kathleen Hanley
kathleenchanley@gmail.com
Spring 2018
M/W 3:30-5:00 PM
McNeil Hall 286-7

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course surveys the history of American cities since World War II, and contextualizes this history by reading the postwar American city on a range of scales from the personal to the global.

In this course, we will consider a number of different systems and vantage points as ways of reading American urban history. We will pay particular attention to economic injustice and racial stratification, to incarceration and surveillance, and to environmental crisis and globalization.

The archive of the course is grounded in critical texts by urban historians and sociologists, but also includes works of fiction, poetry, several films, photography, and music videos, as it takes seriously the idea that the study of cultural production and human life and the study of cities inform one another.

This is a course designed to provide an introduction to the recent history and contemporary life of urban America, and requires no prior knowledge about cities. As it draws on a number of disciplines, this course also offers an introduction to how the disciplines it explores (including but not limited to urban history, sociology, anthropology, journalistic writing and city planning and architectural history) approach the city, and how they more broadly interact.

To this end, this is a course in methods of looking and seeing. It is designed to provide students in all fields with new modes of approaching their object of study, even as it makes an argument for considering how many objects of study (environmental change, immigration policy, global capital, real estate, literature and culture, engineering and design, and many others) productively occur in and interact with cities and urban life.

COURSE QUESTIONS:

- What is a city? What do urban areas have in common with one another?
- What were American cities like in the 1940s and 1950s? How have they changed?
- What can we learn on a global scale about the social and historical trends of the period from WWII to the present by focusing on American urban transformation?
- To what extent is the American city embedded in global systems? In what ways is a distinction between local and global useful for the study of the American city?
- Who lives in American cities and how much choice do they have about where and how they live?

READINGS:

*All readings are available on Canvas, with the exception of the chapters from the three books required for this course, which are on reserve at VanPelt Library and can be purchased at the Penn Bookstore.

Goldstein, Brian. *The Roots of Urban Renaissance: Gentrification and the Struggle over Harlem*. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Klinenberg, Eric. *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. Second edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2014.

TEACHING METHODS

The teaching methods in this course will include lectures, group work, documentary films, photo presentations, in-class discussion, field observations, process writing, and other activities. A careful reading of the texts assigned for each session is necessary to an informed discussion in class. Some class activities will ask you to take a position on the reading, to disagree with it, or to debate multiple perspectives. Because this is a course about urban life that is taught in a city in which many of the dynamics and histories we will discuss are readily present, you may also find it helpful to reflect on your formal field observations for this course, or on other experiences you have had in Philadelphia or in other cities.

COMMUNITY STATEMENT

A classroom is a space into which each of us enters to expand our perspectives, learn new things, and challenge our assumptions. Our classroom, in particular, may engage critically with material depicting violence, racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, classism and other topics that may elicit intense emotional responses, debate and disagreement. Throughout the course we will have frank and challenging conversations about social justice, and about personal and institutional responsibility.

While safe spaces are important, it is impossible to guarantee them in a classroom in which we are respectfully challenging ourselves and one another. What I can guarantee, as your instructor, is that I will work to facilitate conversations that are respectful of every student and that are attentive to the sociohistorical conditions that produce an uneven degree of safety in the classroom and in other spaces.

I ask each of us to validate each person's insights, perspectives and needs as we create a "brave space" in our classroom, and open ourselves to our work in class as a collaborative project for which we need the participation and support of one another in order to succeed.

STUDENT RESOURCES

[Office of Student Disability Services](#): Provides services for students who self-identify as having a disability, including academic accommodations and accommodations for housing.

International Student and Scholar Services: Provides immigration expertise and services to the Penn community, runs programming and outreach partnerships within the university and with agencies like Social Security and Customs and Border Protection.

Counseling and Psychological Services: Provides confidential and free professional mental health services to Penn students, and helps students adjust to university life, manage personal problems, situational crises and academic stress.

Penn Violence Prevention: Engages the Penn community in the prevention of sexual violence, relationship violence and stalking (a collaborative program extending from the Penn Women's Center).

ADDITIONAL ACADEMIC SUPPORT

As this course requires several written assignments, please keep in mind the writing-related resources on campus. Please take advantage of these resources if you desire or need additional assistance with your writing.

The Marks Family Writing Center provides writing support to students across Penn's schools and departments. Peer and faculty writing specialists offer individual writing guidance, as well as more general writing workshops. For further information, and to schedule an appointment, see http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/writing_center/.

The Weingarten Learning Resources Center also offers writing support to all students, and includes Penn's Student Disability Services office. If you have a disability for which you wish to request accommodation, you may do so here: <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/secure/lrc/form/selfid/>.

Additionally, if there are circumstances that may affect your performance in class, whether physical, emotional or organizational, please contact me as soon as you can and we will work together to make sure you are accommodated. For further information, see <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/> and <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are responsible for following the policies (in particular those regarding academic integrity, plagiarism, and original work) contained in the Penn Student Handbook. For further info, see: <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/>.

LATE WORK

If you encounter circumstances that impede your ability to submit an assignment on time, please contact me at least 24 hours in advance of the assignment deadline. Except in the event of a last-minute emergency, no written work will be accepted late.

ASSIGNMENTS

Observation assignment

Early in the semester, you will be required to visit a busy, mixed-use location in Philadelphia (30th St Station, Reading Terminal Market, Jefferson Station, City Hall or another similar site) and observe for 30 minutes. You may choose any space that attracts people for a range of reasons (e.g.: boarding a train but also shopping, waiting but also people-watching). What is happening? Who is there? Why did you choose the space? What do you notice? What does this space tell you about the concerns of contemporary cities? What sorts of urban issues do you see evidenced in this location? You will then write a 2-3 page (double-spaced) response that details where you went, what you saw, and what clues it gives you about the city, its assets and its challenges. Your response will be due to Canvas on Wednesday, February 7th by 11:59 pm.

Reading Responses

Over the course of the semester, you are required to write four short (500 word) responses to the readings for a given week of the course. There are eight possible weeks in which you might submit reading responses, and those weeks are indicated on the syllabus. Each response should address at least two different readings (different sections of the same book are fine, if they make up the arc of the material for that week). Each response should summarize the argument of the readings, situate them within the context of larger conversations from class or from other course material, and explain the strategies that the author(s) uses to make their argument. You will submit your responses on the course discussion page. For each week in which you submit a response, please also write a brief (2-3 sentence) response to two of the reading responses of your classmates.

Midterm Exam

This course includes an in-class midterm exam on Wednesday, February 28th. The exam will cover material from the first half of the course. The exam format will include short answer identifications and longer essays.

Urban Intervention Assignment

The final assignment for the course asks you to identify an urban issue and propose a small-scale material, political or programmatic intervention that would work to rectify it. You are not expected to solve a large-scale urban problem, but rather to propose a program, building project or policy that would improve urban life by targeting a particular urban issue. This assignment will require you to draw on course readings, outside research and field observation, and to persuasively describe not only your proposed intervention, but also your strategies for its implementation. You will submit a one-paragraph paper proposal on April 11th. I encourage you to meet with me as you begin to consider your ideas and how you might approach them. Your paper should be between 7 and 10 pages and will be due to Canvas on Wednesday, May 2nd by 11:59 PM.

Class Participation

You are expected to attend all class sessions, and to bring your reading with you to class. Please notify me as far as possible in advance of an expected absence. You should come to class prepared

to discuss the readings, to connect them to other texts and information and to the ideas and thoughts of your classmates, and to actively listen to your classmates' contributions.

GRADING

- 10% Observation assignment
- 20% Reading responses
- 20% Midterm exam
- 30% Urban intervention assignment
- 20% Class attendance and participation

COURSE ORGANIZATION

The first half of this course chronicles the history of American urban and regional change from the Housing Act of 1949 until the present. The goal of this first half is to identify the relationship between private sector, governmental and third sector factors in the arc of urban transformation. In these first few weeks, we'll pay attention to the transformation of the built environment as well as to the social history of the city.

The second half of the course provides a series of snapshots of contemporary urban issues and how urbanist practitioners have approached them across disciplines and media. In these final weeks, we'll consider what a combination of approaches to the city might reveal about the current questions shaping urban systems and urban lives. We'll ask what planners and sociologists think about what matters to the future of cities, but also what historians, anthropologists, poets, urban ecologists, photographers, musicians and rappers, filmmakers, and other urban residents think about where we should direct our attention as we imagine the future of urban systems and lives.

READING AND ASSIGNMENT CALENDAR

Week 1: Introduction: Reading the Postwar City

January 10, 2018

LaToya Ruby Frazier. [*Flint is Family*](#). (2016)

Jane Jacobs. "The Uses of Sidewalks: Safety" in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 1961. 29-54.

Week 2: Urban Renewal and Deindustrialization

January 15, 2018

No Class (MLK Day)

January 17, 2018

Thomas Sugrue. "Introduction" and "'The Damning Mark of False Prosperities': The Deindustrialization of Detroit" in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. 3-14, 125-152.

Alison Isenberg. "The Demolition of Our Outworn Past" in *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made it*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. 166-202.

Week 3: Foundations of Spatial and Structural Inequality

January 22, 2018

Thomas Sugrue. "'United Communities are Impregnable': Violence and the Color Line" in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. 231-258.

Film: *Do the Right Thing*. Dir. Spike Lee. 1989.

January 24, 2018 – First Reading Response Due (1 of 8)

Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf and Todd Swanstrom. "Place Still Matters" and "The Facts of Economic Segregation and Sprawl" in *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century*. Third Edition. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014. 1-58.

Week 4: Sprawl and Suburbanization

January 29, 2018

Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf and Todd Swanstrom. "The Roads Not Taken: How Government Policies Promote Economic Segregation and Suburban Sprawl" in *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century*, University Press of Kansas, 2014. Third Edition. 103-135.

Kenneth T. Jackson. "The Drive-in Culture of Contemporary America" in *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. 246-271.

January 31, 2018 - Second Reading Response Due (2 of 8)

Dolores Hayden. "What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like?: Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work." *Signs* 5.3: (1980) 170-187.

Edward Soja. "Writing the City Spatially," *City* 7 (November 2003): 269-279.

Week 5: The Dissolution and Aftermath of Public Housing

February 5, 2018

Lawrence Vale. "Public Housing, Design Politics and Twice-Cleared Communities" and "Urban Renewal and the Rise of Cabrini-Green" in *Purging the Poorest: Public Housing and the Design Politics of Twice-Cleared Communities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. 1-38, 193-229.

February 7, 2018 – Observation Assignment Due

Lawrence Vale. "Staving Off Collapse: Mediated Violence and the Beginning of Cabrini's End" in *Purging the Poorest: Public Housing and the Design Politics of Twice-Cleared Communities*. University of Chicago Press, 2013. 230-253.

Film: *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*. Dir. Chad Freidrichs. 2011.

Week 6: Community Development and the Privatization of Urban Change

February 12, 2018

Brian Goldstein. "Introduction" and "Reforming Renewal" in *The Roots of Urban Renaissance: Gentrification and the Struggle Over Harlem*. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2017. 1-58.

February 14, 2018 – Third Reading Response Due (3 of 8)

Brian Goldstein. "The Urban Homestead in the Age of Fiscal Crisis" in *The Roots of Urban Renaissance: Gentrification and the Struggle Over Harlem*. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2017. 153-196.

Michael B. Katz. "The Existential Problem of Urban Studies" in *Why Don't American Cities Burn?* University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. 151-161.

Week 7: Gentrification and Global Capital

February 19, 2018

Brian Goldstein. "Making Markets Uptown" and "Conclusion: Between the Two Harlems" in *The Roots of Urban Renaissance: Gentrification and the Struggle Over Harlem*. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2017. 238-288.

February 21, 2018 – Fourth Reading Response Due (4 of 8)

Neil Smith. "Class Struggle on Avenue B" and "From 'Consumer Sovereignty' to the Rent Gap" in *New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. New York: Routledge, 1996. 3-37, 49-71.

Week 8: Globalization and the Transnational American City

February 26, 2018

Saskia Sassen. "Overview" in *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Second Edition. 2001. 3-15.

Michael B. Katz, Mathew J. Creighton, Daniel Amsterdam & Merlin Chowkwanyun "Immigration and the New Metropolitan Geography," *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 32:5, (2010) 523-547.

February 28, 2018

Midterm Examination

Spring Break

March 5, 2018

March 7, 2018

Week 9: Incarceration and Surveillance

March 12, 2018

Michelle Alexander. "Introduction" and "The Rebirth of Caste" in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: Perseus Books, 2010. 1-58.

March 14, 2018 – Fifth Reading Response Due (5 of 8)

Mike Davis. "Fortress Los Angeles" in *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. New York: Verso, 2000. 221-264.

Victor Rios. "Policed, Punished, and Dehumanized: The Reality for Young Men of Color Living in America" in *Deadly Injustice: Trayvon Martin, Race, and the Criminal Justice System*. Eds.: Devon Johnson, Patricia Y. Warren, and Amy Farrell. New York: New York University Press, 2015. 59-80.

Week 10: Jane Jacobs Revisited: Interpersonal Contact and Informal Economies

March 19, 2018

Jane Jacobs, “The Uses of Sidewalks: Contact” in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York: Random House, 1961. 55-73.

Samuel Delany. “...Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red,” in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 109-199.

March 21, 2018 – Sixth Reading Response Due (6 of 8)

Robert P. Fairbanks. “Introduction” and “‘How it Works’: The Basic Architecture of the Kensington Recovery House System” in *How It Works: Recovering Citizens in Post-Welfare Philadelphia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 1-26, 65-98.

Week 11: Everyone’s History? : Coalitional Engagement and Its Discontents

March 26, 2018

Neil Smith. “From Gentrification to the Revanchist City” in *New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. New York: Routledge, 1996. 206-227.

Eric Klinenberg, “The Urban Inferno” and “The City of Extremes” in *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. University of Chicago Press. Second Edition, 2015. 1-36.

March 28, 2018 – Seventh Reading Response Due (7 of 8)

Claudia Rankine. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Graywolf Press, 2014.

Film: [John Lucas Situation Videos](#)

Jack Halberstam. “Introduction” in Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Oakland, CA: Minor Compositions, 2013. 5-12.

Week 12: Ecological Urbanism and Environmental Justice

April 2, 2018

Eric Klinenberg, “Race, Place and Vulnerability: Urban Neighborhoods and the Ecology of Support” in *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Second Edition, 2015. 79-129.

Laura Pulido. "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California." *Annals of the Association of Geographers of America*. Vol. 90. 20-40.

April 4, 2018 – Eighth Reading Response Due (8 of 8)

Eric Klinenberg, "Emerging Dangers in the Urban Environment" and "Together in the End" in *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Second Edition, 2015. 225-242.

Peter Calthorpe, "Introduction" and "Urbanism and Climate Change" in *Urbanism in the Age of Climate Change*. Washington, D.C.: Island Books. 2010. 1-24.

Week 13: Queering the City: Gay Gentrification and the Politics of Resistance

April 9, 2018

Jen Jack Gieseeking. "Crossing Over into Neighborhoods of the Body: Urban Territories, Borders and Lesbian-Queer Bodies in New York City" *Area*. 48/3. 2016. 262-270.

Christina B. Hanhardt. "Introduction" in *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. 1-33.

April 11, 2018 – 1 paragraph Urban Intervention proposal due

Richard Florida. "Introduction" and "Technology and Tolerance" in *Cities and the Creative Class*. New York: Routledge, 2005. 1-26 and 129-142.

Eileen Myles. "Chelsea Girls" in *Chelsea Girls*. New York: Harper Collins. 1994.

Week 14: Picturing the City – the Photographic Record of Urban Transformation

April 16, 2018

Jane Jacobs. "The Kind of Problem a City Is" in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 1961. 428-448.

Camilo José Vergara. [*Tracking Time*](#). (photographs) (2000-2017)

April 18, 2018

Latoya Ruby Frazier. [*The Notion of Family*](#) (photographs) (2001-2014)

Dennis C. Dickerson. "Black Braddock and its History" in LaToya Ruby Frazier. *The Notion of Family*. New York: Aperture, 2016. 137-140.

Laura Wexler. "A Notion of Photography" in LaToya Ruby Frazier. *The Notion of Family*. New York: Aperture, 2016. 143-147.

Week 15: The Public Culture of Cities

April 23, 2018

Jeff Chang. "Seeing America" in *Who We Be: A Cultural History of Race in Post-Civil Rights America*. St. Martins Press, 2014. 1-12.

Bryan Oliver Green. Amiri Baraka's "[Something In The Way Of Things \[In Town\]](#)" (video)

Amiri Baraka. "Something In The Way of Things [In Town]"

April 25, 2018

Jeff Chang. "Dis/Union" The Paradox of the Post-Racial Moment" in *Who We Be: A Cultural History of Race in Post-Civil Rights America*. St. Martins Press, 2014. 273-290.

Beyoncé. "[Formation](#)," 2016. (video)

Kendrick Lamar. "[Alright](#)," 2015 (video)