

HTS 3011-A: The City in U.S. History
Georgia Institute of Technology
Spring 2015
Room: Architecture East, 107

Instructor: Dr. Daniel Amsterdam

Email: daniel.amsterdam@hts.gatech.edu

Office: Old Civil Engineering Building, G18

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:15-4:15 pm and by appointment

Course Overview:

Through a combination of lectures, readings and discussion, this course examines the nature of urban life throughout American history. It explores how cities have arisen, declined and changed over time due to economic, demographic, cultural and political developments as well as shifts in ideas about how to manage urban and later metropolitan affairs. It also examines how cities have served as engines of cultural and artistic production as well as why cities have been a perennial source of political controversy. Above all, it contends that the struggle to make cities livable and sustainable remains one of the most pressing issues of our time and that understanding the past is an indispensable tool for moving toward a better urban future.

Students are expected to complete all assignments on time and to take seriously their part in building a classroom community committed to civil debate and ongoing discovery, a classroom in which all students feel comfortable stating their opinions and asking questions and, in fact, do so constructively and often.

Learning Outcomes Related to Core Requirements at Georgia Tech:

Area E (Social Science) Approved Learning Outcome

Students in this course will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior. Specifically, they will be able to describe how a series of critical turning points in the social, political and economic history of American cities (including the capitalist transformations of the antebellum period, the industrial revolution, various forms of urban reform in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the rise of federal urban policy, various forms of racial and economic segregation throughout U.S. history, deindustrialization, the spread of a “new” service economy and suburban sprawl) shaped social behavior (including migration and immigration, the formation of protest movements and new forms of political activism, the advent of new government programs and institutions, as well as artistic and cultural production.)

Students will demonstrate their ability to describe these patterns through a series of essay exams specifically geared toward evaluating their capacity to do so.

Required Readings:

- 1) Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866*
- 2) Rebecca Burns, *Rage in the Gate City: The Story of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot*
- 3) Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*
- 4) Peter Dreier, et al, *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century*
- 5) One additional book that will form the basis for an in-class, group presentation and a brief (4-5-page) paper.
- 6) Assorted articles, book chapters and other readings posted on T-Square

All books listed above are available for purchase at the Engineer's Bookstore and the Barnes & Noble on Tech Square. Most are available in e-reader formats as well.

Assignments and Grading:

- 1) Brief Reading Quizzes (10%)

Classes dedicated solely to discussion will begin with a brief quiz consisting of basic questions related to the assigned reading for that day's class. The purpose of the quiz is to confirm that you have done the reading. Your two lowest grades on these reading quizzes will be dropped when calculating your final grade.

- 2) Participation in Class Discussions (15%)

See the evaluation criteria on the final page of this syllabus. You will be given preliminary evaluations of your class participation during the term.

- 3) Book Project (20%)

In addition to the required readings listed on the syllabus, you will choose to read an additional book from a list of options that deals with a political, social, economic or policy issue related to contemporary cities. Along with others in the course who choose to read that book, you will make a compelling and clear group presentation to the class about what that book adds to our discussion of urban life. In addition, you will hand in a 4-5 page, double-spaced paper about the book that you will write on your own (separate from your group). Further details about this assignment will be distributed and discussed early in the semester.

- 4) Mid-Term I (15%)

- 5) Mid-Term II (20%)

- 6) Final Exam (20%)

Exams in this course are meant as tools to help you synthesize the material discussed during the term and to show the instructor your mastery over the topics at hand. In that spirit, they will consist solely of essay questions, which will be distributed at least one week before each exam. You may collaborate with one another when preparing your answers. Doing so will help you learn. You will be allowed to bring the pertinent readings to each exam as well as a one-page outline (and I mean outline), double-spaced, in a 12-point font with one-inch margins to assist you in constructing your answers. You will hand these outlines in along with your essays. Since you will have the questions beforehand, the clarity of your writing and the organization of your essays will be an especially important factor in your exam grades.

Course Schedule:

Jan. 6 – Course Overview

Jan. 8 – Discussion: What Is a City?

Reading: Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” Article on T-Square

Jan. 13 – Lecture: The Precolonial and Colonial American City

Jan. 15 – Discussion

Reading: Gary B. Nash, “The Social Evolution of Preindustrial Cities, 1700-1820,” article on T-Square.

Jan. 20 – Lecture: Capitalist Transformations

Jan. 22 – Discussion

Reading: Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*.

Jan. 27 – Lecture/Discussion: Urban Reform in Antebellum America

Reading: Katz, “The Origins of Public Education,” Book Chapter on T-Square

Jan. 29 – Workshop on Projects

Feb. 3 – **Midterm I (Covers material through Jan. 30)**

Feb. 5 – Lecture: The Industrial Metropolis, An Overview, 1870-1930

Feb. 10 – Discussion

Reading: Lincoln Steffens, “Philadelphia: Corrupt and Contended,” Magazine Article on T-Square.

Feb. 12 – Lecture: Reforming the Industrial Metropolis, Part I: The Urban Working Class, the Question of “Americanization,” and the Problem of Economic Security.

Feb. 17 – Lecture: Reforming the Industrial Metropolis, Part II: Urban Planning and Architecture

Feb. 19 – Lecture: The Southern City, 1870-1930

Feb. 24 – Discussion

Reading: Rebecca Burns, *Rage in the Gate City*

Feb. 26 – Lecture: Jim Crow in the Urban North before World War II

Mar. 3 – **Midterm II (Covers material through Feb. 27).**

Mar. 5 – Lecture: The American City after World War II, An Overview

Mar. 10 – Discussion

Reading: Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, pages 3-123.

Mar. 12 – Discussion

Reading: Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, pages 125-152, 181-271.

Mar. 17 – No Class, Spring Break

Mar. 19 – No Class, Spring Break

Mar. 24 – Discussion

Reading: Kevin Kruse, “The Politics of Race and Public Space: Desegregation, Privatization and the Tax Revolt in Atlanta,” article on T-Square.

Mar. 26 – In-Class Session on Projects

Mar. 31 – Lecture: The “New” American City, An Overview

April 2 – Lecture: Poverty, Policy and the Modern American City, Part 1

Apr. 7 – Discussion: Poverty, Policy and the Modern American City, Part 2

Reading: Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*, 2nd Ed., Chapter 4, on T-Square.

Apr. 9 – In-Class Presentations

Apr. 14 – In-Class Presentations

April 16 – Discussion: Metropolitan America in the Contemporary United States, Part 1

Reading: Dreier, et al, *Place Matters*, Chapter 2-4

Apr. 21 – Discussion: Metropolitan America in the Contemporary United States, Part 2

Reading: Dreier, et al, *Place Matters*, Chapters 6-8.

April 23 – Lecture/Discussion: Conclusions

Final Exam: Thursday, April 30, 2:50 pm to 5:40 pm in our normal classroom.

Criteria for Evaluating Class Participation

Class participation is worth 15% of your final grade. You will be evaluated on a scale of 0 through 6 in each of the following five categories.

- 1) Attendance – Students may miss up to **TWO classes that are solely discussion-based** during the semester without impacting their class participation grade. Any absence thereafter, no matter the reason, will result in a **1.5-point** deduction for a solely discussion-based class. Exceptions will only be made for documented medical and family emergencies. ***In addition, a student who misses more than four discussion-based classes cannot receive full credit in any of the categories listed below.***
- 2) Engagement – Students should be clearly engaged in all aspects of classroom discussion through active listening, note-taking, direct engagement with the written material (they must bring the readings to class) and offering their own reflections and constructive commentary. They should contribute to small group discussions multiple times whenever they occur. They should also strive to contribute to larger group discussions multiple times whenever they occur as well, although their ability to do so might understandably be limited to a degree by the size of the class. Comments made in front of the entire class are not “worth more” than participation in smaller discussions. Nonetheless, to receive the highest grade in this category, students should clearly be striving to make regular contributions to our larger discussions during the semester.
- 3) Quality of Comments – Student questions and comments should show serious engagement with the material. This applies to both smaller and larger discussions. Student comments do not have to be “right.” Indeed, in many cases there won’t be a “right” answer. But they should be on topic (make sense in terms of the question posed) and show a sincere attempt to grapple with the material at hand.
- 4) Use of Evidence – Students should strive to support their comments using appropriate material presented in the lectures and especially from the readings. In most cases, the more specific the evidence, the better.
- 5) Respect for Others – During discussions and debates, all students are expected to show respect for the opinions of others. No one should feel worried about asking basic questions or about stating his or her beliefs. Disagreements may and should occur but should be voiced with kindness and civility. When attempting to right a classmate’s misunderstanding of the material, this should be done kindly and with respect.

In some cases, class participation will include written exercises. The above criteria, where applicable, will be used to judge those as well.

