

Sociology 110 - Urban Life and Problems
Charles Varano

Time: M-W-F 10:00 - 10:50am.

Room: Amador-250.

Office Hours: M-W-F 1 - 2pm.

Room: Amador-454D, 278-6675.

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Course Description

Whether one lives in the city, its suburbs, or in a small town, the changes affecting urban America are vast and significant in our lives. Some view the modern city as an open sore that repels and infects us with crime, vice, and congestion. Others view the city as an open invitation to explore, be anonymous, or to just have fun. Throughout this course we will try to understand how the city as a public space is evolving, what this means for different people, and how people deal with these changes. How do people negotiate the city as “a world of strangers” and deal with the unfamiliarity and incivility of public space? What is the impact of deindustrialization and gentrification on minority groups and the urban poor? How do the homeless cope in an often hostile and unforgiving environment? What struggles are waged to define an urban identity? Is the city becoming an image to consume as much as a place to consume? In considering many perspectives I hope by the end of the semester we might begin to reflect upon the complexity of urban life--the good, the bad, and the ugly--in a manner that helps us deal with it in a more humane and progressive way.

Evaluation

There will be **three** in-class exams (two midterms and a final). Each exam is worth 1/3 of your course grade and each will consist of an in-class exam and a take-home essay of no more than 5 double-spaced (12-font) typewritten pages. Make-up exams will be penalized one grade except for students with a doctor-verified medical reason.

Texts

Anderson, Elijah. *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Liebow, Elliot. *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*. New York: Penguin Press, 1993.

Portes, Alejandro and Alex Stepick. *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Sorkin, Michael (ed). *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.

Students will also be responsible for a small collection of assigned readings that are on reserve in the library and any video materials presented in class. If you are having any trouble with the course, readings, or lectures, please see me immediately so we can work things out. I am available during office hours and by appointment, or you can E-mail me at the address noted above.

Course Outline

*denotes reading on reserve.

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Week 1; Aug. 30 - Sept. 3. Introduction to course.
Life in the pre-industrial city.

Read: *Lofland, Lyn H. *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Spaces*. New York: Basic Books, 1973, chapters 1-2.

Week 2; Sept. 8 - 10. Industrialism and the urban experience.

Read: *Lofland, chapters 3-4.

Week 3; Sept. 13 - 17. Gender and public space.

Read: *Gardner, Carol Brooks. *Passing By: Gender and Public Harassment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, chapter 1.

Week 4; Sept. 20 - 24. The urban tradition in sociology.

Read: *Gans, Herbert. "Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life: A Re-evaluation of Definitions," from Arnold M. Rose, ed. *Human Behavior and Social Processes*, Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1962.

Week 5; Sept. 27 - Oct. 1. **Midterm exam #1, Monday, Sept. 27. Essay Questions due Wed.**

Begin Conflict perspective on urbanism.

Read: *Logan, John R. And Harvey L. Molotch. *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, chapters 1-2.

Week 6; Oct. 4 - 8. Suburbanization: choices by design.

Read: *Checkoway, Barry. "Large Builders, Federal Housing Programs, and Suburbanization," in William K. Tabb and Larry Sawers (eds.) *Marxism and the Metropolis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 152-73.

~Boddy, Trevor. "Underground and Overhead: Building the Analogous City."

Week 7; Oct. 11 - 15. Gentrification and the struggle over public space.

Read: Anderson, Elijah. *Streetwise*, Introduction, chapters 1-2, 5.

~Smith, Neil. "New City, New Frontier: The Lower East Side as Wild, Wild West."

Week 8; Oct. 18 - 22. Changing subcultures in an urban community.

Read: Anderson, chapters 3-4.

Week 9; Oct. 25 - 29. Street wisdom: negotiating public civility.

Read: Anderson, chapters 6-8, conclusion.

Week 10; Nov. 1 - 5. Homelessness: private lives in public spaces.

Read: Liebow, *Tell Them Who I Am*, part 1.

Week 11; Nov. 8 - 12. Continue previous topic and **Midterm exam #2, Friday, Nov. 12.**

Read: Liebow, part 2.

Week 12; Nov. 15 - 19. The making of a multicultural city. **Essay questions due Monday.**

Read: Portes, Alejandro and Alex Stepick. *City on the Edge*, chapters 1-4.

Week 13; Nov. 22 - 24. Ethnic relations: solidarity and difference.

Read: Portes and Stepick, chapters 5-9.

Week 14; Nov. 29 - Dec. 3. Changing forms of urban space.

Read: ~Davis, Mike. "Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space."
~Soja, Edward. "Inside Exopolis: Scenes from Orange County."
~Winner, Langdon. "Silicon Valley Mystery House."

Week 15; Dec. 6 - 10. Consuming public places.

Read: ~Crawford, Margaret. "The World of the Shopping Mall."
~Boyer, M. Christine. "Cities for Sale: Merchandizing History at South Street Seaport."
~Sorkin, Michael. "See You in Disneyland."

**Final Exam and essay question due:
10:15am - 12:15pm, Monday, December 13.
Room: Amador-250**